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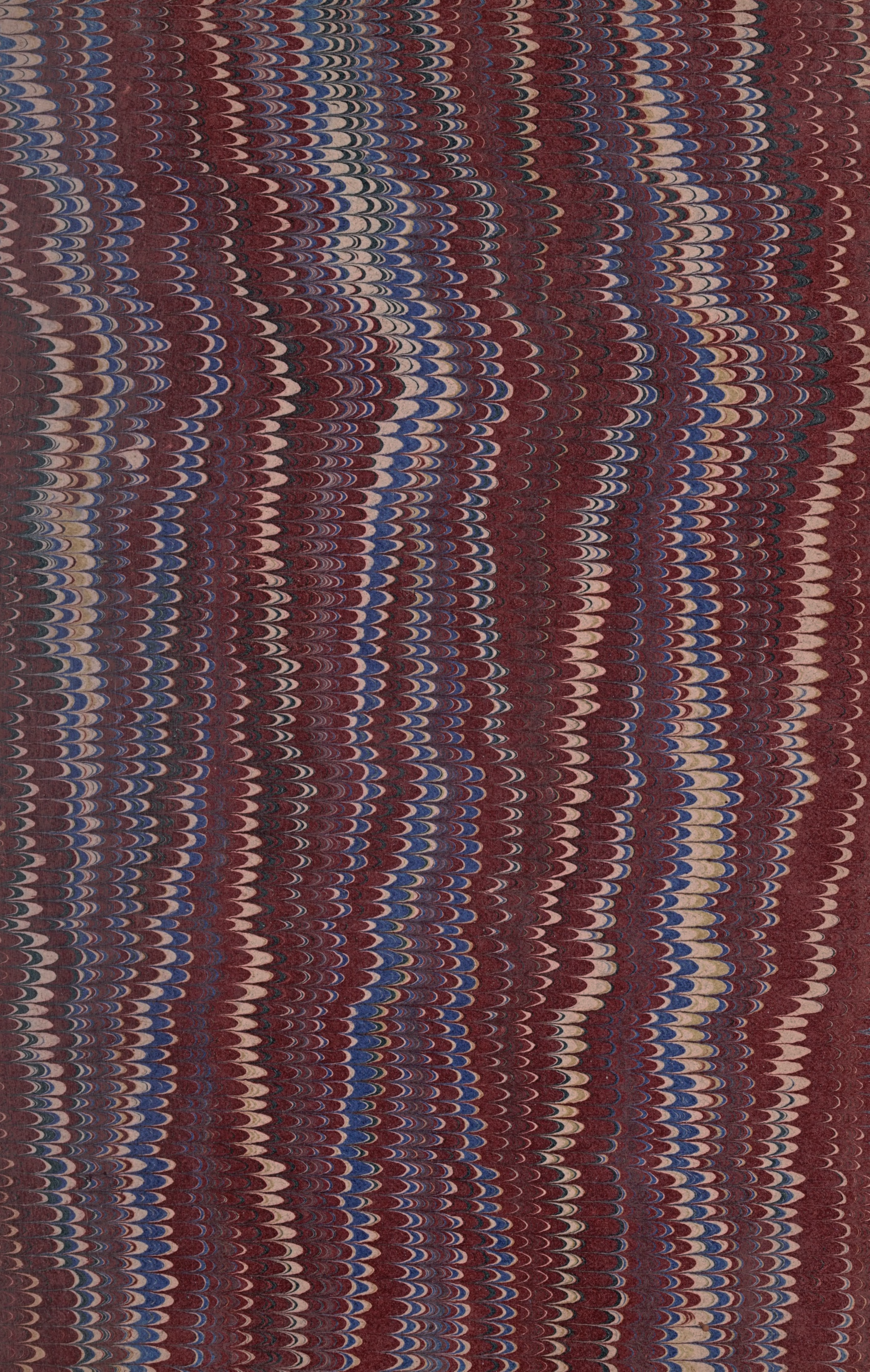
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FRANK HOWARD HOWE.

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Thy Name is Woman.



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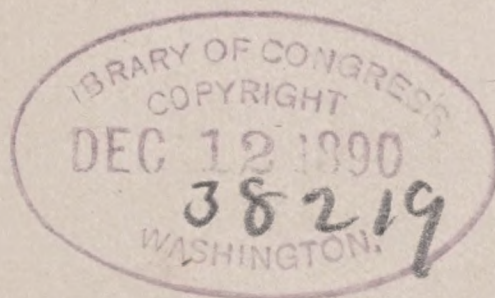
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DUBUT DE LAFOREST

BY

FRANK HOWARD HOWE

AUTHOR OF "A COLLEGE WIDOW," "AN OCULAR DELUSION,"
"THE NEW EVADNE," ETC.



NEW YORK

BELFORD COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

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A WORD OF INTRODUCTION.

THE heroine of this story is a catholic character. The type exists in all countries where civilization has grown old enough to be the mother of luxury. America is as well acquainted with it as France. In this city its name is legion.

It has been a fruitful theme for novelists and poets. In "Middlemarch" Mrs. Lewes treated it in a decorous English way; Thackeray much more boldly and skilfully in "Vanity Fair." Rebecca Sharp is perhaps an abler, a more intellectual woman than Rose Berias, but she is not truer to the passion that controlled both their lives—the love of admiration.

In this book the type has been followed to its logical conclusion; it has been pursued, so to speak, into its last ditch. It seems to me that men will like to have their wives and daughters read this story for the lesson it teaches; and I cannot help believing that every woman, even the lightest-minded, will lay it down with the thought that such a life is not after all worth living.

F. H. H.

NEW YORK, Sept. 1, 1890.

THY NAME IS WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

"MOTHER, I say Rose will ruin us by her foolish extravagance."

The speaker is a little man, a peasant-farmer, whose body, bent almost at right angles by the labor of a lifetime, seems to bow respectfully to the earth from which has flowed his fortune. Francis Berias is now nearly fifty. In his youth he had selected for the partner of his joys and sorrows a large, fresh girl, with red-lipped, laughing mouth, and the solid hips that the function of maternity requires. It is to this girl now grown a gray-haired woman to whom he speaks.

Francis and Janette live only for their daughter Rose, who has just graduated from the private academy of the ladies Castel at St. Cyprian. Although the young girl has been out of school not more than two months, suitors for her hand abound on all sides. The Beriases are known to be rich. Under the sobriquet of "Big-Purse," Francis Berias is a magnate of the village of Jarry's Cross. The nickname, which explains

itself, comes from the big leathern purse in which Francis is in the habit of stowing his money—at least such as is not deposited in the neighboring banks—said to amount to at least fifty thousand francs.

Rose's childhood had been passed in the village. Before becoming one of the friskiest girls at the Castel seminary, she had gone through the primary school at Jarry's Cross. She was a mischievous and cruel young one. At sowing-time she loved to stone the little birds that came to steal the seeds from the furrows in the fields. During the summer she delighted in catching butterflies and pinning them up on the walls of her chamber. Then she would stand by and calmly watch the agonized flutterings of the tortured insects' wings.

One of the things remembered of her in after-years was her habit of playing truant from school for the purpose of watching the operations of the wandering tinkers who made the rounds in the country every six months. One day she was amusing herself looking at a handsome new candlestick exposed for sale in the sunlight. The shopman had gone to dinner and had left her alone with a big dog, Porthos, who was comfortably sleeping in the warmth of the small coal-stove on which stood a vessel containing melted tin. Rose looked all around to see if any one was observing. There being no one in sight, she deliberately

picked up the bowl and threw the burning contents on the head of the brute. The poor dog jumped up, yelling frightfully. Rose ran home. But that evening when the affair got wind, she received a good whipping. When asked why she had done such a cruel thing, she looked her interlocutor in the eye and said with a laugh, "I wanted to see what would happen."

The old villagers shook their heads, and as they could not believe in cruelty like this being premeditated, they began to look upon Rose as a kind of "natural." They said she could not have known what she was doing; that she must have acted under the influence of some evil spirit.

Many facts like these showed the girl's indomitable disposition, her desire for notoriety and her thirst for cruelty. With all this she had a cunning, caressing manner, she was as pretty as a picture, and she was an adept in escaping unharmed from the consequences of her mischievous deeds.

But added years had softened these evil tendencies in the little country-girl. The young graduate of the Castel academy who now sits flirting the leaves of a book that lies open before her has nothing in common with the peasant-child of long ago.

Rose is an only child. She is expected to marry a gentleman some day, and to be a lady of society. Still, Mother Janette did not get angry

yesterday when the hard-working son of farmer Pitois had the audacity to ask for her daughter's hand. The Beriases, though rich, do not look down upon the farmer class. They belong to it themselves. Nevertheless they believe in bettering themselves in the social scale when it comes to a question of marriage. So they wait for a suitable offer.

Rose was a tall, handsome brunette, fresh as the flower for which she was named. Her hands were a bit too red, notwithstanding she did for them all that toilet soaps and powders could do. She was a pretty creature, though, and she knew it.

To-day, Saturday, is market-day at Saint Cyprian. Rose throws down her book and goes upstairs to dress for her journey to town with her parents. Janette is already dressed. Father Berias fumes and frets while his daughter dawdles over the gewgaws of her rather tawdry toilette.

"Well, I can't go out dressed like a servant, and I won't!" exclaims Rose. "Ma, where's my shawl?"

"It's very warm: you won't need it."

"I tell you I won't go out this way."

"There, there dear; here are the keys of the linen-closet."

The young girl opens the closet, gets on a chair, and throws things about in her search for the shawl.

"It is above there, near the wheat-sacks."

"Did any one ever hear of putting a shawl alongside of wheat-sacks!"

And Rose angrily throws down the sacks and a lot of bedclothes, which her mother uncomplainingly folds up again on the kitchen-table.

The young lady wears a light gray dress, a straw hat ornamented with blue flowers, and a little white veil. She gives a last glance into the mirror, simpers and looks at her mother.

"You are going to dress, are you not, mamma?"

"To go to market? Oh no. It's hardly worth the trouble."

"And your brown dress?"

"I'm going to keep that for your wedding."

"We shall see a good many people to-day. If you wish to please me, mother, you will put on your brown dress."

"Rose—"

"Please."

"Oh, if you insist."

"Always those wretched shoes, too!" exclaims Rose, when her mother has assumed the new dress.

"Oh, please don't make me put on my boots. They hurt me so. My feet have been sore ever since I wore them last time, a week ago."

"Are you ever going to get ready?" calls Francis, from the wagon outside. He has put on his blue coat with brass buttons to do honor to his daughter.

The big mare is harnessed to the wagon in the courtyard. One of the farm-hands helps the ladies in, and old Poulotte jogs off. As they pass along the highway lined with tall poplars, the old man delights to point out to his daughter the extent of his possessions and the improvements he has made thereon, together with the cost and prospective increase in value, and so forth. But as Rose does not like figures, she soon wearies of this. Janette, who wears a fluted bonnet loaded down with flowers and as stiff as a bishop's mitre, changes the subject.

"We must have some money for your marriage-portion, my pet, when the right person comes along. Young Pitois offered himself yesterday."

The young girl was tugging at a pair of gloves considerably too small for her.

"He ought to know that I am not for him," she said peevishly.

At this point old Berias gave the reins to his wife and got out. They had reached the long Rennet hill, and the farmer liked to save old Poulotte as much as possible.

"See here, Rosy dear, be reasonable," said the mother when they were out of hearing. "We are considering an offer for your hand now."

"A farmer?"

"No, no. Listen; speak low. He is a gentleman—a notary."

"A notary!" exclaimed Rose, with a dazzling smile. "Oh, speak, mamma; tell me what it all means."

"You know Monsieur Faure?" whispered Jannette, excitedly, carried away by her daughter's enthusiasm.

"Madame Dupré's business agent? Yes. Well? Oh, I am dying—"

"Well, he wants to make a match between you and Monsieur Prosper Parent, the young man who is going to buy Monsieur Cornet's business. The trouble is he has no fortune. But he is prudent and sober; he has a good figure—"

"He is not handsome."

"Oh, beauty is not a man's business. He comes of a good family."

"And he'll be a notary."

"As you say, he'll be a notary,—at Saint Cyprian, right near by."

"Oh, how mad that will make Blanchette, who is going to marry a foundling!"

"Yes; but I am afraid your father will not give his consent. Monsieur Parent has no fortune."

The mare stopped here to let her master get in.

"Good Poulotte! how well she knows me!" said Berias, taking the reins. Then he called to some drovers on their way to town, whom they were just passing: "I'd take you aboard if I had room. But, you see, there's three of us."

"Thanks, Monsieur Berias, thanks."

Monsieur Berias! They were beginning to call him Monsieur Berias. Francis blushed with pleasure.

"What a thing it is to have a fortune!" he chuckled. "Twenty-five years ago I was one of Count de Galleur's farm-hands. They called me simply Francis then. Afterwards when I began to make money they called me 'Big-Purse,' because they were jealous of me. Now I am Monsieur Berias. Ah, a grand thing is money!"

"Papa," said Rose, "you ought not to speak about the days when you were a farm-hand. Some one will hear you."

"But I am proud of it, daughter. I didn't steal my money. I earned it, I bet you."

"Daughter is right," said the mother, quickly. "Don't always be talking about the same thing. Get everybody used to calling you Monsieur Berias. That's what you should do."

Soon they reached Saint Cyprian, a pretty little country town with painted church-steeple, prim straight streets, clean white houses, and trim gardens half in sunshine, half in shadow. The ladies got out in front of the Castel seminary, opposite the Golden Chariot inn.

"All right," said Berias, "here we are. Go and make your visits. I am going to the market. When will you get through with all your errands?"

"About five o'clock."

"Oh, that'll be too late. The boys at home 'll be sure to forget to feed the cattle."

"You are always fussing!" exclaimed Rose, sharply. "Will you never get used to having yourself served by somebody else?"

"Daughter," stammered the old man, "I am thinking more of you than of myself. It is your fortune that I am looking out for. Don't be cross with me."

As her father spoke he began to unharness the mare, taking the greatest pains the while not to soil the new collar and the freshly oiled harness. His daughter looked at him for a moment in silence.

"Call the hostler, can't you?" she exclaimed angrily. "People will say you are doing your own work in order to save feeing the servants."

But quickly recovering her temper, Rose murmured sweetly in her father's ear:

"You won't mind, papa, if mamma buys me a new dress at Madame Julie's, will you? You want me to do you proud, don't you, papa?"

Berias fell at once before her caressing manner.

"Your mother has the purse," was all he said.

"Ah, mamma, see, papa wants me to have a dress just like that one of Gabrielle Lavellois."

While the hostler was assisting the old man to unhitch his horse, the ladies entered the Castel academy. Rose went at once to join her old

schoolmates in the playground. The Castel ladies greeted her mother in the seminary parlor.

"Well, Madame Berias," said Miss Amanda Castel, an old lady who wore spectacles, "we understand you are about to marry off your daughter."

"Yes, I suppose so; but there is no hurry. A thing like marriage is always too soon done if badly done, isn't it?"

"Oh, but that could never happen to Rose. She is a charming child who would make any man happy. Haven't you made a choice yet?"

Janette shook her head in silence.

"Ah, you are hiding something. That is not right, Madame Berias. You know I am a second mother to your child."

"Nothing is decided," stammered Janette, thus appealed to. "Monsieur Faure—"

"Ah! Monsieur Faure—an excellent man. He will make no mistake."

"Madame Castel, you will be discreet, won't you? We are thinking of Monsieur Parent."

"Prosper Parent—that big young fellow who used to follow the girls' promenades on Sunday? But he has no fortune."

"That's the trouble. But they say he is worthy and sober—"

"Very sober and good. Yes, he will let her lead him round by the nose."

"Nothing is settled yet, madame."

“Then Rose will come to live at Saint Cyprian. Monsieur Cornet will leave his business to your son-in-law. That will be very nice. I hope it will all come out so, Madame Berias. You know what an interest I take in my old pupil. If you can put us to any use, my sister and I are at your disposal.”

Soon Rose came in from the playground, and the two ladies took their leave. They walked down the street which led to the market-place. Rose walked erect, with sweeping stride, her ankles well arched. Behind her trotted Janette, doing her best to imitate her daughter's carriage. But the mother's good-will did not prevent the daughter from making some ill-natured remarks on the subject.

“Ma, don't try to mimic me. People don't walk like that. You drive me wild.”

Directly they entered Madame Julie's shop. Rose made them unroll all their goods, and finally chose a dress of blue material with white stripes, with which she intended to drive all the young women of Saint Cyprian wild with envy. Her mother also consented to get her a new pair of corsets in place of the wretched seminary affairs; also a dozen handkerchiefs, which Rose would embroider herself. Janette emptied her purse. Madame Julie did not wish to take the money. It was not customary, she said, to be paid except on delivery. But Madame Berias was obsti-

nate on this point. She caused a smile to go round the circle of clerks when she presented herself before the cashier, saying,

“We make debts? Not much. We have money, and we pay as we go.”

Rose attempted to stop her mother's foolish boasting, but at bottom she was not at all sorry to hear her fortune bragged about. As the two ladies passed out, the clerks saluted them ceremoniously as good patrons.

“If,” said Janette, when they were in the street and she had taken her daughter's arm—“If we pass before Monsieur Cornet's office on North Street we may see—”

“Monsieur Parent? A good idea. I want to see if he is as homely as ever.”

“He is not homely.”

“Very well, ma; but you will admit there are handsomer fellows than he. Now, Marquis de Jamaye's son—”

“Oh yes; but the count is not for us, my pet.”

“I know that,” said Rose, moodily. “After all, I'd rather be Madame Parent, the notary's wife, than the wife of a man who does nothing.”

Mother and daughter had now reached the end of North Street, and had come in sight of the gilded signs of Monsieur Cornet shining in the sunlight. The office was full of farmers. Prosper was nowhere to be seen.

"Anyway," said Rose, "I'm not going to live in that shanty."

"Oh, the house is not bad," said Janette. "If the marriage takes place, I think it will be best to get on the right side of Monsieur Cornet."

"Oh, that won't be difficult."

By this time they had arrived in front of the Golden Chariot Inn, which they entered wearily, encumbered as they were with their bundles of packages done up in brown paper.

"There are your ladies," said a little old man to Berias. The two were talking in an animated manner behind the long line of wagons and carriages that blocked up the market-place.

The little old man was Monsieur Faure, a lawyer of the neighboring town of Ruy. He was a thin, wiry old fellow, always on the lookout for business, sharp and shrewd, but much esteemed in the countryside for his honesty and other sterling qualities.

He saluted Madame Berias, and winked cunningly at her, as much as to say that Francis had not as yet been won over to his ideas about the marriage.

"Can't you convince him?" queried Janette.

"A beggar like that!" exclaimed Berias, "Never. I'd rather have a farmer and done with it."

"Come, come, Papa Berias," said Monsieur Faure, soothingly, "don't get excited. We'll talk

it all over together at Jarry's Cross to-morrow, after we've slept on it."

Rose twisted her parasol and seemed to take no interest in the conversation.

"We'll talk to-morrow," repeated Faure. "We will arrange a little affair that has nothing at all to do with Miss Rose. Eh, Rose?"

"What, Monsieur Faure?" queried Rose, innocently.

"Nothing. You'll see later. Haven't your ears burned to-day?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, I know some one who has been saying lots of nice things about Miss Berias. You will make a regular gossip of me;" and the old man went away laughing.

Meanwhile old Berias was as red as a turkey-gobbler, where he sat huddled together on the front seat of the wagon as they jogged homeward. He was silent, but inwardly raging.

"What's the matter?" asked Janette.

"What's the matter? Monsieur Faure is a knave or a fool."

"Monsieur Faure? Oh, how can you say so?"

"I like him," observed Rose, dryly. "He's a dear old gentleman."

"What is the matter?" repeated the farmer. "Faure wishes to ruin us. But I am the master here. It shall not be."

"But what is it? Tell us. What is the matter?"

"The matter is that he wants to marry our daughter to a lad who hasn't a cent—not a foot of land. This Parent—"

"Monsieur Parent is a very upright young man," said Rose.

"Yes, indeed," added Janette.

"Then you knew?"

"Yes, we knew, and we were going to talk it over with you this evening."

The little old man, ordinarily so kind to his Poulotte, gave her such a furious lash with the whip that she reared and nearly fell over backward.

"Then, by damn," he roared, "it shall not be!"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Janette.

"Mother, take the reins," said Rose, coolly.

Again they passed by the Berias properties. The poor old man surveyed them sorrowfully. He felt his heart sink within him as he thought of the son-in-law who was coming to be their ruin.

That evening as mother and daughter were sitting together in the kitchen after the supper-things had been cleared away, Rose said,

"Mamma, I like Monsieur Faure very much."

"You are right, my child. We ought to have a kindly feeling for those who interest themselves

in our welfare. Monsieur Parent does not displease you much?"

"No. He looks kind. I think I shall be happy with him. You see, ma, I am not going to live in the country any longer. I must have society."

"But aren't you afraid of the hostility of the Saint Cyprian ladies? There are already people who mock at us in the street."

"Oh yes, envious people. But I'll shut them up."

"After all, daughter, I can't blame you. You ought to profit by your good fortune. I wouldn't know how to get used to being a lady. But it is different with you. You have been educated. You are a young lady."

When she had gone to bed that night, Rose dreamed of her future. She thought that once married there would be no end to her happiness. They laughed at Saint Cyprian on market-days when she sported a new toilette. She would teach them that a lady may dress as she pleases when she possesses money and has a gentleman for her husband. Madame Parent. It was not a bad name, indeed. It sounded better than Berias. The future was a mere question of observation and patience. At first, no doubt, she would have some trouble in adapting herself to the ways of good society. But she would get used to it little by little, and she would profit by watching how others did.

CHAPTER II.

THE day after market-day at Saint Cyprian, the young clerk in Cornet's office appeared disturbed.

"My dear Prosper, you are somewhat pensive this morning," said the notary to him as he sat with his face buried in his hands.

Prosper raised his head. He seemed to be waking from a dream. As his eyes met those of his old friend, he blushed.

"Oh," went on the old gentleman, good-naturedly, "there's no reason why a fellow who is going to take to himself a wife should not waste a few moments from his business. What the devil do you want to conceal? You are old enough, and there's a fortune to be gained. Madame Cornet and I are delighted at it all. The office couldn't fall into better hands. You may have all the time you want to pay us in. Old Francis has a good big lot of money laid aside, they say. Little Miss Berias is a bit countrified, to be sure. But, pshaw! she is just out of school. She'll soon develop. Ah, she's pretty enough to eat. My dear Prosper, you are going to be as happy as two turtle-doves."

The young fellow did not attempt to stop this avalanche of words. Monsieur Cornet was a perfect windbag. A good business man and an excellent lawyer, he was yet an interminable gossip. He had practised his profession for twenty-five years, and was now president of the Chamber of Notaries of the province. As soon as his business should be sold out, he was sure of being made county judge. He had no children, and his expectation was to retire to his place in the country, whence he would come to town once a week to hold court. He had wished to sell his business to his clerk for a long time past. But Prosper was not able to pay cash, and obstinately refused to buy on credit, notwithstanding the old gentleman's good-natured rallying.

"Get out, you idiot!" Cornet would say. "Madame Cornet and I have no heirs, have we? The whole thing is bound to come to you some day. What's the matter with you?"

If the negotiation just undertaken by Monsieur Faure should be successful, however, Prosper would be able, after having married Miss Berias, to pay for the business out of his wife's portion, and so get rid of his unpleasant scruples.

Prosper Parent was an orphan. Being one of the brightest boys in school, he had won many prizes, which it had been Monsieur Cornet's duty as chief visitor to confer on him. Gradually the older man had taken the boy under his protection,

and later into his office. Afterwards an accident had bound the two still more closely together. Monsieur Cornet's horse had one day run away with him, and the old gentleman would undoubtedly have had his brains dashed out against a wall had not his clerk, who happened to be hard by, jumped at the furious horse's head and, at the imminent risk of his own life, held on until he finally brought the brute to a stand.

He was a tall young fellow, with a pleasant and even timid expression of countenance. His blue eyes shone with good-nature ; his big bony hands denoted an uncommon degree of physical strength. His carriage was rather slouching. A curious thing was noticeable about him as he walked. His great shoulders seemed to bend beneath the weight of some invisible burden. It was as if the young giant were trying to conceal the fact of his enormous muscular development. He had rosy cheeks ; his beard was rather straggling. A small brown mustache, of the same color as his short thick hair, shaded his big mouth and his large white teeth.

He was twenty-six years of age. Ever since coming out of school he had worked in the office alongside of old Clapier, a model of exactness and promptitude. Clapier had been there eighteen years. He was very fond of Prosper, and looked forward with pleasure to the time when he should be his clerk.

About three o'clock in the afternoon of that day Monsieur Faure entered Monsieur Cornet's office. Prosper was alone. He was dreaming of the beautiful face he had so often watched as it passed by in the prim procession of the seminary young ladies. How he had for months dreamed of that face, waking and sleeping! But, alas! he had no fortune. She could never be his. He was only building air-castles. When he awoke from his reverie and found good Monsieur Faure seated beside him, his agitation became extreme. The old gentleman slapped him pleasantly on the back, and said,

"Prosper, you'll have to burn a candle in my honor. Your affair is as good as accomplished."

Prosper turned pale.

"Then she does not find me too ugly—or too big—or too poor?"

"Too ugly? You are splendid. Too big? I'd like to have your figure. Too poor? The business is worth ten thousand francs a year. My dear fellow, the wedding will take place within six weeks. Old Berias will have to come round."

"Oh, then Monsieur Berias doesn't want me for a son-in-law?"

"I didn't say that. Francis' only objection is that you haven't any fortune. But his wife and I are going to beat it into his thick skull that your business will bring in more than both his farms

together. As for Rose, she can hardly contain her joy."

"But Miss Rose does not know me."

"She knows you perfectly well. She has seen you at church a hundred times."

"I believe I *can* make her happy."

"Monsieur Clapier," said Faure to the old clerk, who at that moment entered, "you will come to the wedding, won't you?"

"It is true, then, what they are saying all over town? Ah! so much the better. Good! good!"

Clapier had never been so eloquent in his life. He warmly pressed the hand of his coming chief and went back to his work, whistling softly. With Clapier this was always the sign of a light heart.

Monsieur Faure and Prosper talked on a few moments more, and then separated after having made an engagement to call together the next day at Jarry's Cross.

Berias had calmed down a good deal overnight. His wife had treated him to a good long Caudle lecture in the privacy of their chamber. She dwelt upon the very good thing that Prosper would have in the Cornet business, and upon his future inheritance of the Cornet fortune. She praised Prosper's ability, integrity, and sobriety to such good effect that by morning her husband did not have a leg to stand upon, as she afterwards good-humoredly expressed it to Monsieur Faure. So the next day when the latter and Prosper pre-

sented themselves at the White House (by which name the Berias residence was known in the countryside), they were surprised and not a little pleased at the reception accorded them by the old farmer.

They were invited to stay to dinner. At this meal the young lady assisted. She was very prettily dressed and appeared modestly unconscious of what was going forward. Monsieur Faure gallantly kissed her forehead, and Prosper blushingly bowed to her.

At table Francis had much to say about a disease that was ravaging the vineyards thereabouts. The old merchant dwelt learnedly on certain methods of improving vine-culture. After the dessert Monsieur Faure produced some cigars. Francis tried one.

"Father, that will make you sick," said his daughter. "Don't you smoke, Monsieur Parent?"

"No, miss."

"See there, now!" exclaimed Monsieur Faure, in a rallying tone, "he hasn't a fault."

The two young people went out to walk in the garden.

"You work pretty hard at Monsieur Cornet's?" was Rose's first query.

"Oh yes, miss."

"Does Madame Cornet give evening parties?"

"No, miss. We live very quietly."

"Did you go to the last ball at the sub-prefect's? Did you have a nice time?"

"I don't know how to dance, miss," said the young man, blushing.

They had reached a big oak tree in the garden, the lowermost branch of which had been bent down so as to form a species of settee. Rose made Prosper sit down, and the big young fellow began to tell her his dreams, timidly at first, until the girl's great eyes emboldened him to a wider confidence.

On the piazza Berias chewed away at his cigar, which he had lighted in vain ten times at least. At last he threw it away. Janette picked it up.

"It's good to drive bugs away with," she said.

"Well, Francis," said Monsieur Faure at last, pointing out into the garden where the young people's voices could be heard in animated conversation, "you see the thing is going its own gait."

"Yes, I suppose so, devil take it!" growled the old fellow, not yet completely won over.

"You must invite him to come again," said Janette. "That is the proper thing to do."

So, later on, when Prosper was taking his leave, the farmer said to him, graciously enough.

"If you care to come and see us, Monsieur Parent, we shall be glad to have you."

Thus urged, the young clerk became a frequent visitor at Jarry's Cross. His wooing prospered

bravely. Won over by the strong desires of his wife and daughter, Berias at last gave his consent. The wedding took place with a degree of pomp and circumstance such as Jarry's Cross had never before witnessed.

To do honor to my heroine, I should be glad to give my readers some account of the ceremony, and especially of the bride's resplendent toilette, in which you may be sure she looked a perfect queen-rose. But my business is rather with her future life, and I content myself here with chronicling the fact that the wedding, as a social event, was a success unsurpassed in the annals of that countryside.

After the wedding the two young married people remained for two days at Jarry's Cross. They were long days to both: to the bride because she yearned to begin enjoying her new home at St. Cyprian; to Prosper because he burned to be alone—alone with his bride and his love. Rose was very complaisant to her young husband, and he on his part followed her about like a spaniel.

In their housekeeping plans the bride expressed a variety of ideas, each one more extravagant than its predecessor. Her mother raised her hands in horror. But the young husband invariably sided with his wife.

"You are the sole mistress," he would say. Whereupon Rose would smile upon him charm-

ingly, which would raise the poor fool to the seventh heaven of happiness.

The notary rented them his house with all its furniture just as it was. For the time being Rose had to content herself with the old calico curtains and the unfashionable beds of the former *régime*. But Prosper expected soon to become the possessor of one of the handsomest places in the city. Until then the young bride made a nest for herself in the prettiest chamber in the house. There, confident of the future, she began in a small way to realize her dreams.

CHAPTER III.

FOUR years passed rapidly away. A lovely little daughter, whom they called Andrée, came to gladden the hearts of the Parent family.

The notary adored his wife. He sought every occasion possible to escape from his office so as to slip upstairs and surprise her with a long loving kiss. Generally she received him amiably. But sometimes when she repulsed him he would return to the office so awkwardly that Clapier had no difficulty in perceiving that his young employer's happiness was not altogether unalloyed.

The community had great confidence in Monsieur Parent. His marriage had established his credit. His serious disposition attracted the sympathy of all who came in contact with him. Every Sunday the peasant-farmers would bring the savings of the week to deposit with him. The new notary was given unlimited control over these deposits, which aggregated a large amount.

Monsieur Cornet had, as foreseen, been made county judge. After the session of court on Thursday, if he found he had time before returning to his home in the country, he would look in at the office and spend a quiet half-hour in the

presence of the old familiar pigeon-holes stuffed with dusty papers.

Meanwhile, the Parents had moved into their new house. It was built in the Oriental style and was surrounded by pretty gardens and trim lawns, its roof being half concealed beneath luxuriant foliage which protected it from the rays of the sun. Rose felt that her real life had not begun until she perceived herself surrounded by the luxury which manifested itself on every side in her new home.

The notary never said a word as the heavy vans of the truckmen brought to the house loads of the handsomest furniture from the best Parisian houses. Father Berias was stupefied by what he saw. But Janette declared that Rose was quite right. There was no need to be uneasy. Notaries could make money as fast as they pleased.

Rose had such sweet little teasing ways for overcoming the objections of her husband on the few occasions when he ventured to oppose her.

"But, my darling," he would say, "you have already a handsome bureau and dressing-table for that room."

"Prosper," she would reply, "let your own little wife do as she wants to. We shall have company sometimes. We don't want our guests to think they would be better off in an inn."

At first the young married people slept together. But Madame Parent found out that it was the proper thing for a wife to have a chamber of her

own. The reading of certain romances rather sharpened her ideas on this point. She took especial delight in the adventures of Queen Margot, who received her lovers everywhere, even under her husband's nose. So a separate chamber was furnished for Prosper.

One evening Madame Parent gave a little dinner to a few friends. There had been some difference between husband and wife as to whether the Berias family should be invited or not. But Rose had settled the dispute by saying,

"Pa and ma would not feel comfortable in the company of people with whom they are not well acquainted."

Parent said nothing more, and the Beriases quietly took their daughter's hint that they had better stay at home.

It was a cold clear January day. The snow had been falling for some minutes, and the white flakes were beginning to collect upon the window-panes, when Laverie, the footman, announced,

"Madame is served."

The conversation was a little dull at the commencement of the dinner. But it had become quite lively by the time the dessert arrived. Prosper, seated opposite his wife, had at his right hand Madame Gavier, the wife of the sub-prefect; at his left their next-door neighbor, Madame Loudois. Then came Monsieur Cornet, Monsieur Faure, Colonel Benjamin, an old retired officer

who wore his uniform at all times by special permission. Near Rose were the sub-prefect ; Monsieur Loudois, the mayor ; Monsieur Victor Moulineau, the poet-painter ; and lastly a tall, blond young fellow, who had come evidently without ceremony, being dressed in a blue coat and gray trousers, with a silk handkerchief carelessly sticking out of his breast-pocket. This was George Loudois, the mayor's son. His mother had begged him to assume a more suitable costume for the dinner, but he had shrugged his shoulders, saying it was not worth while bothering for the Parents.

The tall young fellow conversed well and freely. From time to time he tried to catch Rose's eye. But she, busied with the management of the dinner, did not observe him. He consoled himself by plunging into an animated conversation with the wife of the sub-prefect, who was immensely flattered by his attentions.

After dinner the guests, including the ladies, began a game of baccarat. Madame Gavier lost, much to her discomfort. Thereupon she commenced a system of flagrant cheating, besides borrowing boldly and persistently from the funds of the players on either side of her, which at last caused a sharp remonstrance from her husband.

Meanwhile in the kitchen the servants were gossiping furiously.

"Is Jarry's Cross far?" asked Margaret, the new cook.

"About an hour and a half on foot."

"Do the old people come often to Saint Cyprian?"

"No, not often," said the footman. "My lady is ashamed of them."

"Well," said Margaret, "I don't blame her. It is a bore to have peasant-people like that at table. Indeed they ought to keep little Andrée away from the farm more than they do, I think."

"Oh, but Madame doesn't like to hear her cry. So they keep her most of the time at Jarry's Cross with her nurse."

"What an old chatterbox that Loudois woman is!" observed Laverie.

"Don't talk to me about her. She has changed her servants four times in two months. She drives her son George half wild with her tantrums."

"She is an ugly old thing. Nevertheless the mayor need not envy the other men."

"The mayor was a gay lad in his youth, I bet."

"They are dancing," exclaimed the cook, as the sound of piano-music penetrated to the kitchen.

"Do they give many receptions here?"

"Every week."

"And do our people go out much?"

"Yes, to the mayor's and the sub-prefect's."

"Very good. The next time they go out we'll have a party ourselves."

When the guests had gone, Parent looked about upon the scene of disorder in the dining-room. "What a muss!" he exclaimed.

"You are always finding fault with something," cried Rose, hotly.

"My dear wife," the poor husband rejoined humbly, "it is because I feared you were going to have some trouble with your servants."

He followed her to her bedroom, and as she took down her hair offered to kiss her neck.

"Don't bother me," she cried. "Can't you see I'm tired to death?"

He sat down humbly on a lounge and began to admire the beautiful long tresses that hung in thick masses over her embroidered chemise.

"How beautiful you are!"

"Please don't."

"Well, kiss me, then. There, on the forehead."

"Oh, be reasonable. There, then. Now go away."

She double-locked the door as soon as he was gone. She slept badly, or rather not at all. The candle burned dully on the night-table. The winter wind shook the window-panes disagreeably. The snow, now turned to rain, beat monotonously upon the glass. With her pretty head slightly bolstered up by the laced pillow, Rose read her novel. From time to time she turned a leaf and then, shivering, drew her hand back under the cover. Her imagination meanwhile was filled

with all the gallant adventures of which she had read. She did not know, she said to herself, that her life was going to be so calm and stupid. She half wished she were not married.

A step was heard outside.

"Is that you, Prosper?"

"Yes; I saw a light in your room. It is almost dawn. Are you sick, dear?"

"No. It is gone. Will you come in?"

She got up, threw off her peignoir of blue velvet, stepped into her slippers, and opened the door. The rustling of the peignoir as it fell on the carpet, the frou-frou of the eider-down quilt as she threw it back, gave Prosper to understand that he might enter his wife's chamber. He came in and felt himself intoxicated by the scent of this woman's sleeping-room. He came up to the bed, lifted the peignoir from where it lay on the floor, and lit another candle.

"Any one would say you were afraid of me," sighed Rose, putting her arms around her husband's neck.

"You don't dislike me any longer, then, do you?"

"Why no, dear; what nonsense!"

"Then I must make a confession. Will you forgive me? I have been listening at the door. Do you know you have been talking to yourself?"

"I have?"

"Rose dear, can't you see that it is not real

life that is pictured in these novels that you read? They all lie—they are written only to amuse. The only happy existence for a man is a life passed by the side of a loved and revered wife. Can't you be content just to be my wife, and banish from your mind the foolish dreams that these silly books inspire?"

"You are right, Prosper. I read too many novels. My imagination is led astray. You are a dear, and I am sorry I sent you away just now."

"Give up the books and begin with your piano again. That will furnish you distraction."

"My music is a little rusty. But I will try if it will please you."

"I am not such a bad fellow, am I, Rose? Don't you think you are a little cruel to grieve me as you do sometimes? And we have been so happy these four years past."

"We shall still be so, dear."

"I know that I am not as loverlike sometimes as perhaps I might be. But it is because I spend so much time over those musty papers in my office."

"I love you as you are, Prosper."

"Truly?"

"Yes. See here."

She embraced him with a sudden passion that seemed to die as quickly as it was born.

"Now go, Prosper. I am not feeling well, and I am very tired. Good-by."

“Good-by, my best-beloved.”

He went out slowly, stopping at the door to look back at the charming picture made by his wife, her pretty head lying on the pillow with her white arms thrown languorously over it, while a caressing smile hovered about her pouting lips. Prosper went to his office that morning with a light heart; he was eager to work for his charming Rose.

The Beriases now rarely came to see the Parents. Francis could not forget his being relegated to the second table by his daughter on a certain market-day when he had come in to dinner. Janette reddened with anger when she heard of it. She had made quite a scene at the time, but, as usual, had soon cooled off, and was her old tractable self again when Rose went to visit at Jarry's Cross to see her little girl Andrée. For the instinct of maternity was not entirely dead in the young woman's heart. In her way she was passionately fond of her child. She could spend entire days fondling her, dressing and undressing her, and playing at the game of “mamma” or any other childish sport that struck her whimsical fancy. She received every day a love-letter from her husband, who, poor fellow, was very lonesome during her absence, but glad at learning that she and the child were happy. These letters did her good. She promised to become economical, to devote

herself to the education of her child. But, alas! a single invitation to a dancing-party was sufficient to dissipate all these good resolutions. She wrote at once to Paris for a dress. She became feverish to know what the other ladies would wear. It was her ambition to be the best-dressed woman on the dancing-floor.

“I must go back to Saint Cyprian,” she exclaimed to her parents. “There is going to be a ball. If I am not there the rest of the women will be too well pleased, and I don’t intend they shall be.”

CHAPTER IV.

MONSIEUR FAURE was famous all the country through for his ability in selling property, real or personal, at public or private sale. He was always in great demand at the dinner-tables of the notaries, who vied with each other in lavishing attentions upon the wiry little man. But he gave the best of his business to the Saint Cyprian office.

One day Rose met Monsieur Faure in her husband's office. He had come to see Prosper about the sale of a neighboring farm at public vendue, which was to occur the following day.

"Is it a good thing for us, Monsieur Faure?" she asked.

"Very good, little one—beg pardon—madame."

"Oh, call me 'little Rose,' as you used to do when you danced me on your knee. I confess I don't like familiarity from people whom I know but slightly, but I should be sad indeed if an old friend like you should think it necessary to put on airs with me."

She graciously gave him her hand.

"Like the English, you know," she laughed. "It's the fashion now. How much will the sale bring us?"

“Twelve hundred francs at least, eh, Prosper?”

“Yes, if we get the price we hope for.”

The next day, the day of the sale, was a Sunday. In the afternoon all the farmers from the countryside gathered at Legrand's inn, near the farm that was to be sold—an estate called “The Thermettes.” Their wives accompanied them. It was altogether quite a fête-day. The men drank wine, the women lemonade. A dinner had been provided by Monsieur Faure to which ample justice was done by all. After this the real business of the day was introduced by the old lawyer and his auctioneer. “The Thermettes” was being sold at public vendue because its master's wife had ruined him by her extravagance. This fact gave rise to the following bit of gossip overheard at dinner between two farmers' wives:

“This is what comes,” said one, “of too extravagant living. Monsieur Parent is fortunate in being able to make money in such big lumps. His wife costs him a pretty penny.”

“Oh, don't speak to me of that brat,” grumbled the other ancient dame. “‘Big-Purse’ puts on a lot of style now, doesn't she? Why, I've boxed the jade's ears a hundred times for teasing my goat Bicquotte. She's so proud she'll hardly look at her poor old father nowadays. She makes me sick.”

“She'll come to no good,” rejoined number one. “She has less heart than my pug Lulu. Do you

know she doesn't see her little girl for months together. If I owned her I'd spank her."

During the progress of the sale Prosper became very uneasy. He was continually looking out of the front door for his wife. Rose had gone to dine with some friends who lived not far from the inn. She was to rejoin her husband when the sale was over and return with him to town.

"What's the matter, Prosper?" queried Monsieur Faure at last.

"I am worried about Rose. Why does she not come, I wonder. It is five o'clock. I'm afraid one of her bad headaches has taken her again."

"What does the doctor say about her headaches?"

"Oh, always the same thing. He prescribes bromide of potassium. But she does not improve. It almost kills me to see her sick."

At this moment Rose appeared at the doorway supported by Madame Dumeniaux, the lady at whose house she had been dining. She was extremely pale, and at once sank into the chair which Monsieur Faure hastened to place for her. It appeared that she had had a sudden attack of illness at her friend's house. It was, however, not very serious, since a little cold orange and sugar water had served to bring her around. They had wished to put her to bed, but she had refused. All of this put the young husband into a great state of excitement.

"We must go home at once, Monsieur Faure," he exclaimed, "we must go home at once. Have the horses harnessed immediately."

"But the sale?"

"Oh, damn the sale! My wife—my poor, poor wife!"

And before the astonished farmers he knelt distractedly by the side of his wife and began to rub her forehead with his handkerchief dipped in ammonia-water, crying the while,

"They can get another notary. We must go home at once."

The next day Rose spent in her room, in morning-wrapper, with the blinds closed, in that semi-darkness which she liked so well. She refused to receive callers with the exception of Madame Loudois. When that lady had gone, she heard a sharp ring at the door-bell. Peeping out of the window, she beheld George Loudois. He was leaving his card after inquiring about her health. He was very handsome. He appeared to her like one of those heroes of old romance with whom her imagination was peopled. She compared him in all his graceful bearing to the awkward fellow now working away in the office below. She shut her eyes so that the mental vision might not escape. It seemed as if some mysterious new feeling to which her heart had hitherto been a stranger had taken possession of her. She went and stood before her glass. She was pale, very pale. But from

the depths of her dark eyes there flashed upon her a glance that told her she was worthy the most passionate love.

The next morning when she awoke they brought her a big box that had just come from Paris.

"It is my new costume," she cried. "Margaret, go and tell Monsieur Parent to come up here at once."

Margaret had not to go far, for Prosper was listening at the door, to enjoy the surprise and delight of his wife.

"Oh, I feel better already!" cried Rose, when she saw him. "How good you are! I am so happy! But I am ruining you."

"Don't worry, Rose dear. Some moneys have come in that I did not expect. The Vanneau estate has payed me a pretty penny. You shall have your cashmere cloak too. I don't want my little wife to have to envy other women anything."

She took his hand and carried it to her lips.

Some days later Prosper might have been seen running about from door to door trying to borrow from his friends money enough to pay the registry-fees of some deeds.

"That woman will be his ruin," moaned old Clapier, almost in tears.

CHAPTER V.

MONSIEUR LOUDOIS' house was next to that of the notary. The grounds were separated partly by a little brook and partly by an old tumble-down wall. The two families were on such good terms that neither had cared to mend the wall, and as a consequence of this neglect the weather had been permitted to make a large breach in one part of it. Through this breach ordinary communication was kept up between the two families. They no longer had to go round by the street. George had been the first one to inaugurate the custom, when he one day slipped through the breach for the purpose of coming over and smoking a cigarette with Prosper in his garden. Afterwards both families profited by his example.

George Loudois, accustomed to Parisian life, was often bored at Saint Cyprian. The notary said to him one day,

"Come and make yourself at home in my office. That will serve to distract you, and by and by you will get used to our little town."

"He is right," said George to himself. "It'll take the nonsense out of me. The companionship of a good fellow like Prosper will be good for me. He rests me."

One Sunday in April, Rose, who was still far from well, met the mayor's son in the garden. She had come out to breathe the perfume of the lilies, just in bloom, and also to get rid of the noise of the office. On the other side of the old wall George was reading a paper. He raised his head on hearing the sound made by Rose's little feet on the gravelled pathway.

"Oh, I didn't know you were there," exclaimed the young woman. "How you scared me!"

"I never moved at all," laughed George.

"Has your mother gone to church?"

"Yes, father, mother, servants, and all. The whole household is at church."

"And you?"

The young man glanced up quickly at Rose. Her face was rather pale, but under the little coquettish cap that shaded the Madonna face George saw something that made his heart jump into his throat—a sort of indefinable beckoning to his desires.

"One doesn't live here in the country," he said after a pause. "One simply drags a ball and chain."

"Oh, that's not polite of you. You know I have always lived in the country."

"Forgive me. I only mean that life is a bore when no one loves you."

"You must get married."

"Get married?"

"Certainly. Ought not all young people to settle down some time? Your mother would be very glad, I know, to have a pretty daughter-in-law. And that reminds me: they are talking of your approaching marriage."

"And to whom do they assign me, pray?"

"To your charming cousin, Miss Varennes."

"Marie?"

"Don't you think you could love her?"

"Oh, there is a cousinly friendship between us. But love is another matter."

"Love always comes in the end."

"Do you think so?" George exclaimed, turning red and then pale.

The church bell broke in upon their talk.

"They are saying the benediction," murmured Rose. "They'll be out in a moment. Good-by, Monsieur Loudois."

"Good-by."

George had not dared to avow the love that had sprung up in his heart for this woman. But he knew that he adored her. Did she understand? How many nights he had sat in his chamber, sorrowful and dejected, and gazed upon the light shining from the Parent windows! When the light was put out, how he had raged with jealousy! How he had sworn that another man should not possess this woman whom he loved with his whole soul! And now Rose dared to talk to him about marriage with another, as if

she did not know that she herself was the sole obstacle to such a marriage!

He paced up and down the garden-path, fuming. This woman, this country-girl, at whom he had been wont to sneer, should he permit the pretty devil to enslave him?

George was at bottom a conscientious fellow. The idea of deceiving his bosom-friend was horrible to him. He despised himself for entertaining it for a moment. Then before his mental vision came Marie, his fiancée, sweet and fair, garnished with all the virtues. How dare he compare Marie Varennes, a girl of distinction and breeding, with this "Big-Purse" at whom even the peasants sneered!

He took counsel with his parents that same evening. He told them he had had enough of bachelor life. He would marry his cousin whenever they wished.

"George, my dear child, how good you are!" exclaimed the delighted mother. "I knew you would come to our way of thinking."

"Marie will be a happy girl," said his father, grasping his hand cordially.

"But let it be settled at once, father."

"Ha, ha! You are in a hurry, my dear fellow, eh? But give us time to put up the bans, do. To-morrow we'll go out to the Bastides to see Aunt Simeon."

Madame Loudois made a confidant of Rose.

"George is going to be married."

"To Miss Varennes?"

"Yes, my dear. We are delighted. He decided on it rather suddenly. He has for the past few weeks been entertaining the wildest projects. Fancy! he wanted to go to India. He wanted to become an exile for the rest of his life. But I brought him round. Dear fellow, he has a heart of gold. My niece Marie is a charming creature, as sweet as a cherub. Oh, how happy I am!"

About this time Rose became very religious. She sought distraction from the desires that gnawed at her heart by absorbing herself in prayer beneath the vaulted roof of the village church, while the air around her trembled with the deep sonorous tones of the organ. The solemnity of the church and the faint odor of the sacred incense brought a certain degree of quiet to her disturbed mind. But it was not for long. By and by the sermons began to weary her. She wished to avoid the throng of worshippers who crowded the church. It seemed as if her secret ecstasies were marred and blurred by the sight of fashionable toilettes, and by the voices of those who carried on the service.

One evening she took her way, through the twilight, to a little chapel which she had had erected at the end of the garden. The night was dark and still. She knelt before the great white

plaster figure of the Virgin, and prayed for strength to enable her to still love her husband, and to drive away the evil thoughts that haunted her even in her prayers.

Prosper, uneasy at the disappearance of his wife, had stolen out after her, and had reached the little chapel just as she was rising from her knees. She gently took his arm and drew him along a garden-path. As she walked she talked of the cares of the household, of the consolation that her prayers had given her, of the great danger young women ran in reading too many novels, and of other kindred subjects. She vowed to change her mode of life, and formed many plans for the future happiness of her child. Her illness had vanished. She rested her head upon her husband's breast and wept happy tears. She and he were wrapped together in a holy calm.

But this fit of conscientiousness was unhappily only too short-lived. In a few weeks the young wife recommenced her feverish, disordered mode of living.

Every Saturday the Parents gave a dinner. Among the guests were the county judge, Monsieur Faure, Colonel Benjamin, the Marquis of Jammaye, a rich client of Prosper's, and Monsieur Victor Moulineau.

This Moulineau was a unique character. He was called "Pouter" from his habit of carrying his chest well forward like a pouter-pigeon. Be-

sides making verses and daubing a little with paints, he was the band-master of Saint Cyprian. He was short and stout, but his head and face closely resembled those of Leopold II., King of the Belgians. He was a professional heart-breaker, yearned to compromise himself with married women, winked meaningly at every pretty face he saw, and was fond of declaring that Madame de Mersay, a noble lady who occupied a neighboring château, was dead in love with him. Having been once in the army, he declared that a military life was the only bearable one. He averred that the fact that he, Moulineau, had never advanced beyond the corporal's grade was due to his colonel's jealousy of him on account of his wife, a passionate little blonde. He neglected to say that he had been thrice broken by a court-martial, and that the end of his term of service had been greeted by a sigh of relief from all his comrades. The truth was that there was more bombast than malice in his lies. He never deigned to perceive the incredulous smiles of his auditors. It was understood that he carried about with him a list of his conquests, which was said to embrace all the most respectable ladies of Saint Cyprian. Vanity so ruled him that he was always willing to ruin himself in order to be thought rich. It was worth while to see him in his chamber, mounted on a chair, surveying himself in his mirror, and declaring in a rapturous voice,

"O Nature, two inches more and thy handiwork would be perfect!"

Rose hated Moulineau. He was to her mind a petty, ugly, boastful boor. But she dissembled her dislike, fearing his tongue. Once, however, the old fellow, being a little in his cups, had declared his passion for her. Whereupon Rose had boxed his ears so soundly as to secure her from that time forth from a renewal of the disagreeable subject.

It was upon this Saturday that the marriage of young Loudois was announced. After dinner there was a deal of talk about it in the drawing-room.

"Madame Loudois is very happy over it all," observed Madame Cornet. "They said that George could not abide country life."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed Moulineau, roughly. "You can get used to anything. I used to live in Paris myself. I have recited my poems before the Emperor. I had a great success both in literature and upon the stage. Very good. But now it is different. I wish for rest, for peace, for repose. When I was young I dreamed of pitching my tent amid the far-off sands of the desert. To-day I am willing to die here at home in my own bed."

"Were you at the wedding?"

"Oh Lord, no!"

"There were very few people, I believe?"

"Only the family," said Rose. "Prosper dined there the day the marriage-contract was signed."

"The young lady will be welcome to Saint Cyprian's society."

"Yes, if she can get along with her mother-in-law she will be all right."

"When will they be back from their wedding-tour?"

"In about a month."

"They take their time."

"They can afford to: they are rich."

Meanwhile the household affairs of the Parent family were going from bad to worse, and Prosper was becoming more and more involved in debt. He had borrowed money from his father-in-law until the old farmer now refused to lend him another penny.

When the young Loudois couple returned to Saint Cyprian from their wedding tour in Italy, George was deeply in love with his young wife. Marie was a little creature, white and fresh as a rose after a shower, with a sheaf of flaxen hair, and with blue eyes in which shone the pale flame of maidenly chastity.

The usual visits were paid and returned.

"Madame Parent is very pleasant," the young bride remarked after meeting Rose.

"Yes," said her husband, carelessly, "but she is not at all stylish—a mere villager."

"That's the first time I ever heard you say anything disagreeable about any one, George dear."

"I was wrong. Forgive me, love."

George and Marie gave themselves up to long evenings of love-making, while the swans in the garden-pools below toyed with each other as if influenced by the example of the young lovers who were plainly visible in the moonlight from the Parent piazza.

"How happy they are!" murmured Prosper.

"Think so?" sneered Rose. "It is always like that at the beginning."

"Don't talk so, dear. You know how I suffer because I am not able to give you all you long for."

"Oh, don't begin that nonsense again."

"Rose!"

"Yes, I have had enough of your canting. You refuse me even the most necessary things. Why, that costume that I—"

"But think—a thousand francs: it is a very large sum, and we are not rich."

"*We* are not rich! Why, you know it is my money."

"But I work."

"Work! Bah! your colleagues laugh at you. That sale of the Cernier farm—they even got that away from you."

"I couldn't raise the sum necessary to pay the expense of registering the deeds."

"You couldn't? Well, what has become of all those large sums you said were owed to you?"

"I lied to you."

"Lied to me?"

"I had to borrow to get you what you wanted. Have pity upon me, Rose. I am in a desperate situation. I don't know which way to turn."

"Then it's your own fault, you fool. Bah! you disgust me."

Rose went to her room in high dudgeon. Prosper followed humbly. He sat down on the foot of the bed and looked at his wife as she disrobed. Tears glittered in his eyes. Rose thought him silly and cowardly to cry like that. If he really loved her, would he not have gone and demanded the money of her own family? There was plenty of money at Jarry's Cross. But he was afraid of being humiliated by a refusal. True love would hesitate at nothing. No, indeed; he did not love her—he did not love her.

Prosper brushed his hand across his eyes and got up. He promised to go the next day and tell Janette all about it. If she would not listen to him, then he would manage some other way. But at all events Rose should have her new dress for the sub-prefect's ball.

When Prosper had gone, Rose, half undressed as she was, went to the window and peeped out from between the curtains. She could see in the shadows below the still figure of a man leaning

against the big hazel-nut tree that stood in their garden. It was George Loudois. The young wife had disappeared. Rose gazed at him for a moment with mingled feelings of love and dread. Then, fearful lest she might be observed by the young man himself, she dropped the curtains hastily and threw herself upon her bed.

CHAPTER VI.

PROSPER went to Jarry's Cross the next day. Old Berias was at work in the hay-field; Janette was busy over some clothes that had just come from the wash.

"Hullo, son-in-law," she exclaimed, on catching sight of Parent. "How are you? Rose isn't sick, is she? Nor the little one? What's the matter? You look as pale as this linen."

"Mother," groaned the young man, "I am very unhappy."

Thereupon he gave Janette a full account of his troubles, taking care at the same time to so arrange his story as not to awaken the old lady's anger more than possible. He begged her to induce Berias to come to his aid. He took all the blame on himself. Rose was not at all in fault. He should have looked out for the expenses of the household; henceforward he would be more careful. When he had finished, Janette shook her head gravely.

"In short," she said, "you want more money. Well, we haven't any more. You know you owe us twenty-eight thousand francs already. All our savings are swallowed up. This cannot go on.

We had laid by a good deal, but think how many privations we have had to endure all our lives in order to do so. You wouldn't beggar us in our old age, would you? We have done all we could. Then think of little Andrée. By the way, why didn't you bring her? She is happier here than at home. But you never come to see us, you and Rose, except when you want money."

Thereupon the old lady went back to her work again. But she was a soft-hearted creature, too. When she saw Prosper sitting dejectedly in his chair, with his face in his hands, she hesitated a moment; then going to him, and taking his hands in hers, she exclaimed good-naturedly,

"There, there, son-in-law, don't take it so hard. I was a little too harsh, perhaps. Come, I'll see Francis. We'll borrow the money if necessary. For I know you can't help it. You are economical enough. It's Rose's fault. I shall have to talk to her."

"How good you are!" murmured Prosper, brokenly.

"Come, come," continued the good woman, bustling about. "You are still in the dumps. We'll borrow the money, I tell you. Ah, here comes Francis."

In fact, the old farmer at that moment entered, after having carefully wiped his shoes on the grass outside.

"Ah, Monsieur Parent," he exclaimed. Fran-

cis sometimes forgot and called his son-in-law "Monsieur." "How are Rose and Andrée?"

"Come, father," said his wife, "you are overheated. You'll take cold."

"Yes, mother, I am not as strong as I used to be. I'm getting old. I shall have to take to woman's work."

He mopped his face with a big bandanna handkerchief, and sat down astride of a chair with his back to the fireplace, in which burned a few fagots.

"Anything new, son-in-law?"

Janette leaned over her husband's shoulder and whispered into his ear.

"That's always the way," exclaimed the old man, when he had listened for a moment. "I told you we should come to curse this marriage. They want to be gentlemen and ladies, and meanwhile the savings of our whole life go up in smoke. They spend in a day what we could live on for three months. They take everything we have. Now the neighbors have begun to call me 'Little-Purse' and laugh at me. Monsieur Parent, I will not ruin myself. I am too old to work. I began life as a farm-hand, and I don't want to go back to it. I won't go back to it. I won't—"

The old man's voice was broken with anger and his eyes burned like a fiery furnace. Parent stammered some words of apology, and then Janette intervened in her daughter's defence.

"Rose thought she was richer than she is," she urged. "But she is growing older and wiser now. We must forgive her."

"Women never know the value of money," replied the old man. "If we mortgage our land that will be the end of us. We can give you nothing. You don't want to send us to the poor-house, do you?"

The notary explained that he did not wish to beg, but only to borrow. He would be able to pay. Last year he had made upwards of ten thousand francs, and this year his business would be better. He would not trouble them further, however. Some fees would be coming in soon. His creditors would have to wait. And he took his leave.

Arrived at home, he went at once to his wife's room. She was undressing little Andrée.

"Isn't she pretty, our little daughter?" was the mother's first remark. Then she asked, "They didn't refuse, did they?"

"They would not listen to me."

"Then I must—"

"Oh, I shall have enough money from other sources."

"Then I can have my costume?"

"Certainly."

"How good you are, Prosper! You don't want your little wife to be dressed like a cook, do you? Never fear. I shall be beautiful."

"You are beautiful," sighed the poor devil, clasping his big hands and gazing at her with all his eyes.

"Oh, you great flatterer! and you haven't kissed me yet."

"My Rose!"

"Believe me, Prosper, the happiest marriages are those where there is an occasional quarrel. It is so sweet to make up afterwards."

"I trust your headache will not trouble you the night of the ball, darling."

"Oh, never fear. The ball will be superb. There will be beautiful toilettes. You will be proud of your foolish little wife, Prosper."

CHAPTER VII.

THE grand ball at the sub-prefect's took place on the 6th of June. All Saint Cyprian had prepared its best bib and tucker for the great event.

Rose was finishing her toilette. She was robed in a superb dress of English lace. She was pinning a bunch of tea-roses in her corsage and taking a last admiring glance at herself in her mirror, when Prosper entered in evening dress. He remained on the threshold as if petrified with admiration, and exclaimed with the enthusiasm of a young lover,

"How beautiful you are, Rose!"

"Think so?" with a silvery laugh.

He approached her where she stood before the glass and pressed a passionate kiss upon her throat.

"A man need not be handsome if he is only clever, eh?" he said.

"But you are good-looking, Prosper, too—rather. Andrée looks like you a little. See, she is asleep." She led him to the alcove where the baby's cradle was. "How pretty a sleeping baby is, isn't it?" she sighed.

Andrée's head, with its silky golden curls, lay lightly on the lace pillow. The rosebud mouth,

half open and smiling, seemed to beg for kisses. Prosper, fearing to wake her, lightly kissed her brow, and then softly covered her with the silken coverlet.

"Rose, a house with such an angel to watch over it is indeed blessed."

"I think it is time to go, dear," said Rose.

"Let me kiss you once for our child."

"Oh, you will muss me. You must not make love like that all the time. It is irritating."

"You complain of not being loved."

"I?" The faintest touch of irony hovered in her eyes for a moment.

"We don't need to be among the first," he urged.

"Nor among the last," she said.

At the sub-prefect's, when Rose entered the drawing-room upon her husband's arm, she was greeted by a murmur of approbation from the men who stood near the doorway, while the ladies bit their lips in surprise and envy.

"The notary is going to the dogs," was whispered.

"Yes, and the 'Big-Purse' Beriases are in a great to-do about it."

The rooms filled up rapidly. The sub-prefect talked affably with the member from the district, a handsome young man, nephew of a Cabinet Minister, who bore one of the greatest names in France. They were surrounded by several of

the leading citizens, the young man's constituents. There was some fear that a certain leading physician would canvass the district against him. The question was whether something could not be done to stop this.

"Yes," said the member, Count Berk de Villemont, "there is one thing that will stop him—the cross of the Legion of Honor."

"To be sure—the cross. That will do it."

"Will he take it?"

"Yes, and with both hands, too. He will become more of a Bonapartist than either of us."

The young Count moved away and, approaching Rose, offered his felicitations upon her looks and toilette. Madame Parent felt herself to be indeed the queen of the ball. She smiled graciously upon the member, and taking his arm, moved with him into the dancing-room. When they had finished their waltz, they joined Madame Gavier and her mother, Madame de Carreuse, who were discussing with some of the guests the approaching ball at the prefecture at Pensol. Madame Carreuse was saying,

"The prefect charged me to inform Saint Cyprian society about it. There will be some excellent music. Madame Parent, you will have a chance to hear some of the finest artists of the country."

"I have been intrusted," said de Villemont, "with the business of looking after the musical

talent. Madame Parent, I know you are a good musician. Won't you help me?"

"Rose thanked him with an adorable smile. "Aha!" she thought, "they are beginning to see that I am somebody."

By this time the non-dancers, including Prosper, were busily engaged at the card-tables in an adjoining room, baccarat appearing to be the favorite game. George Loudois approached, and offering his arm to Rose, led her again to the dancing-room, where the strains of the waltz from "Faust" were languorously rising on the air.

"What delicious music!" murmured George, as they started off.

"Oh yes," sighed Rose.

"It raises one to a more delightful world. It sinks one in a dream that one would have eternal. Unpleasant realities disappear."

"It seems to me you are not very complimentary to your pretty little wife—and you so recently married, too."

"Oh, please don't spoil my dream."

"You owe your happiness to me. You must not forget that."

"I will never forget it," whispered George. His voice trembled with excitement.

"You hold me too close, sir. You hurt me."

"Pardon—pardon, madame."

"Where is my husband? do you know?"

"He is in the card-room."

“ Oh, please be careful. You are bruising my hand, you hold it so tight.”

The intoxicating music of the waltz still rose upon the air. First it was like some languorous invitation, some whisper of love. Then it swept through the room in a wild whirlwind of harmony, which in turn melted into a melody tender and low that seemed to lull the hearts of the dancers into sweet ecstatic dreams.

“ What a poet Gounod is !” said Rose as they whirled by young Madame Loudois, who appeared to be regarding them attentively.

“ Yes, and a good comrade, too.”

“ You know him ?”

“ Quite well. I met him at Naples two years ago. You are right, madame ; he is not a musician so much as a poet. Why don't you play more yourself ? You are an artist.”

“ Oh, don't laugh at me.”

“ No, I assure you— ”

“ How do you know I can play ?”

“ I listen to you evenings.”

“ Don't speak of it, then. People might not think it proper.”

“ Oh, but we are known to be neighbors and good friends.”

George presses her closer to him. The black of his trousers is buried in the white foam of her lace dress. Their bosoms touch. The young woman, half-unconscious, abandons herself to the

intoxicating rhythm of the delicious waltz. The floor and ceiling seem to join each other in the mad whirl. The time quickens. The lights from the great chandelier dazzle her. The tear-roses tremble in her corsage. She seems no longer to be upon her feet. Now she glides off into the cadences of the music, and anon writhes about the great light of the chandelier like an adder love-sick for the sun. Little drops of perspiration stand upon her brow. Her quivering nostrils dilate as if to inhale some sweet odor long forgot. Her mouth, always so fresh, now dried by the heat of the room, gasps for breath. The moisture from her whole body seems to rise and strike her in the face. She feels faint and giddy. Once or twice she bends back with heaving breast and straining limbs as if to tear herself loose from the fatal whirl. But soon she ceases to struggle. Everything spins round her. The furniture and the ladies seated about the room seem to bow to her in the cadence of the music. The lights come down from the walls and take part in the dance.

“I must tell you something,” George was murmuring in her ear. “I have struggled against it—I can do so no longer. You are killing me. I love you!”

“Sir—sir!”

“Yes, I tried to forget. I married because you

wished me to. I do not love her—my wife. It is your image which haunts me always—always.”

“For God’s sake!”

“I am a wretch, I know.”

“In Heaven’s name!”

“Forgive me. I adore you. O Rose, I love you with my whole heart!”

“It is cowardly in you to compromise your wife so.”

From the card-room came the confused sounds of play.

“I bet twenty-five louis.”

“Banco for his Majesty, Leopold. Hurrah for Pouter!”

Moulineau was winning, and was accordingly in the seventh heaven of satisfied vanity.

Still in the ball-room the white cloud of lace continued to whirl about like the wings of a great white bird that hovers in the air, now higher, now lower, until it is lost in space. The women began to gossip. It was not proper to dance like that. Madame Parent must think she was at a ball in her native village. It was indecent.

“Oh, I can go no further,” gasped Rose. “Oh, my head! I am dying.”

The waltz was over. George led Rose to a sofa, where she was at once taken with an attack of vertigo. She put her hands before her eyes in a last spasm of ecstasy, and, half wild with excite-

ment, half fainting with fatigue, she seemed to lose herself in a blissful dream.

"Does not Monsieur Parent dance?" said the sub-prefect's wife to Rose when she had recovered herself.

"Never."

"*Your* husband, Madame Loudois, on the contrary, is a delightful waltzer."

"Yes," said Madame de Carreuse, "George is one of those rare people whom one finds nowadays who still know how to dance."

"Your wife has been dancing for you and herself both," the sub-prefect said laughingly to Parent in the card-room.

"I have never danced," said Prosper. "It makes me dizzy, just as the whirligigs used to when I was a child. As for George, it is different. He still thinks himself a young man."

"A good fellow, George."

"Splendid. We all love him. Ever since his marriage, too, he has been more content to stay at Saint Cyprian. I believe his father will soon give up the mayoralty to him."

By this time the guests were departing. The carriages which waited in front of the park gates were swallowing one handsome toilette after another. Colonel Benjamin, Moulineau, and some of the gayer bachelors adjourned to a neighboring well-known café, where at three o'clock in the morning Pouter became so drunk that he swal-

lowed a glassful of champagne out of his dancing-pump on a wager. After this the inebriated party amused themselves until morning in talking scandal about the Saint Cyprian ladies. They were especially severe on Rose and her half-hour's dance with George. She had, they averred, fainted in the latter's arms. As for Loudois, he was a duffer to forsake his pretty little wife for such a woman as "Big-Purse."

"How silent you are, George!" said his wife that night after the ball.

"I?" said he, absently.

"You are not ill?"

"No."

"You are pale. Shall I make you some tea?"

"No, Marie, I am all right."

"These official receptions *are* disagreeable. Our small parties are nicer, aren't they?"

"We must get used to it as it comes, Marie."

"Do you love me very much, George dear?"

"What a question! I love you with my whole heart, dear little wife."

"Kiss me. You haven't kissed me since we got home. How cold your hands are, Georgie, and your heart beats—oh!"

"It is nothing."

"And then you look so funny."

"I am tired and sleepy, little one."

"O George, if you should deceive me!"

“Hush, you crazy child.”

The next morning Rose had a severe headache. She shut her door against every one, and when Prosper came to inquire about her health she asked him not to stay long. She must be alone—all alone. The least thing irritated her. She drove the cook's little girl out because she had but one eye. One-eyed people horrified her.

Little Andrée was placed upon her mother's bed. The child contemplated her for a long time, and then said in her baby way she thought she had never seen mamma so pale or so pretty before.

But Rose sent her away with the rest.

The child was right, however. Rose was wonderfully beautiful. The headache had animated her features. Her eyes shone with a strange brilliancy. She possessed all the graces of a love-sick woman. Her careless poses were graceful, her glance filled with seductive and mysterious promises. Her beautiful black hair shone in its jetty lustre like a mass of polished ebony. Through her half-opened embroidered chemise her white and pink-tipped breasts seemed to palpitate. Her face was pale. The little blue veins stood out on her white temples, and the slender hands, like delicate pincers made of steel and of love, grasped each other so fiercely that the thin fingers seemed like to snap. She lay upon her

back with the bedclothes drawn well about her, expressing, rather than concealing, the delicate mould of her body, and resigned herself to an ecstatic vision.

She dreamed of last night and of how she had conquered the admiration of all ; of the sweet words George had whispered to her ; of the thrill, never before experienced, that had run through all her person when she had felt herself whirling with him in the waltz. She remembered the evening at her own house when she had had the firmness to remain cold to him. She it was who, down there in the garden, had told him to get married, had boasted to him of the joys of a united and legitimate love. And now, all trembling as she was with remembrances that held her in their amorous embrace, she recollected that after the waltz, when she had returned to her seat blinded by the dazzling lights of the chandelier, a whisper of intoxicating delights to which she had been so far a stranger had crept in upon her consciousness, and for the first time in her life she felt that some part of her nature remained unsatisfied. Tormented by a desire that no other than he could quench, she found herself filled with a rage of jealousy against the young wife, who, passionless and cold as she was, was unworthy to share a delight which she could not understand.

After that day of feverish unrest, she seemed to hear mysterious songs through the night-

watches. It was as if a whirlwind of harmony was sweeping through her brain. She had seen nothing, known nothing of a life of gallantry; her delirious imagination made her guess the truth. In the canopy above her bed she saw women lying in graceful postures. Young men, delicately fashioned, approached their goddesses with cups overflowing with intoxicating perfumes. The women let fall their robes and took down their raven or sun-gold hair. Then their bodies were mingled in a heavenly embrace.

In her dream she delighted to seek out some one among the throng of lovers who might resemble her George. She found him in the handsomest of the men, the one whom the naked women sought after most eagerly, and who by his magic glances seemed to hold them in a sublime ecstasy.

All of a sudden her imagination stopped soaring. The realities of life claimed her. She compared her awkward husband with the ideal of her dream. Prosper wished to be gallant; he was only grotesque. She saw in him only an animal, eager for gratification, but without spirituality and ignorant of the divinity of love.

Later in the night she grew calmer. In the morning her maid Margaret came to dress her, bringing the news that the Loudois family had gone into the country. This pleased her. After breakfast she went into the garden. Seated under the shade of a chestnut tree, dressed simply

in her blue striped morning wrapper, with her head leaning back against the trellis of the summer-house, she amused herself with the antics of a couple of turtle-doves that were cooing their love-song in a cage above her. This cage, in the wires of which were placed some pomegranate twigs for the birds to peck at, was one of Rose's great pleasures. She cared for it herself, bringing water and gravel for the birds' use. And child that she was, she loved to let them peck at her fingers, laughing long and loud the while, so that the birds could see her white teeth gleaming between her blood-red lips.

Then when, under the warmth of the summer sun, the coo of the male dove became more pressing, when he chased his mate, and she at first ran away from him, then allowed herself to be taken; and when, after their love-kisses were over, the male, exhausted by his victory, remained upon the perch clapping his wings, with closed eyes, she stood by the side of the cage, blessing nature, happy to be alive, and it seemed to her as if the very violets lent their odor to excite the turtle-doves.

But her own satisfaction was factitious. She felt herself suffocating amid the throng of amorous dreams that filled her sick soul. She asked herself whether she dare hope.

When she had returned to her chamber she was seized with a nervous trembling. She began

to cry out loud. Margaret sought to soothe her with kind words, but in vain. The attack became so violent that her sobs were audible even in the office. Prosper rushed up to see what was the matter. Before that haggard face, that writhing mouth, that body which tossed so violently upon the bed, threatening every moment to bruise itself against the sharp corners of the wood, the husband wrung his hands in affright.

“ I beseech you, Rose, don’t act so.”

“ Leave me alone—alone.”

When he had gone, she gradually quieted down. By and by she felt herself growing stronger.

“ Oh, I will remain a pure woman !” she moaned through her set teeth. “ I will—I will. Oh, my poor head, my poor head !”

CHAPTER VIII.

THEATRICAL entertainments were quite rare at Saint Cyprian. The old city-hall, which was the abiding-place of such travelling companies as happened that way, was sometimes closed for months together. But soon after the sub-prefect's ball it was announced that one of the best combinations in the country would shortly give a series of representations there. The manager of the troupe—Couty by name—was a native of the town. He was on his way from the south of France, where he had not been very successful, and the idea occurred to him to play an engagement in his old home. His company was a good one, though small. It consisted of himself, his two daughters Clara and Naomie, blonde and slender Gretchens, two old friends of the manager, three young men and two very pretty girls, besides Uncle Julian, the “first old man.”

Couty filled at the same time the responsible positions of manager of his company and leading man. He expected to get some amateurs at Saint Cyprian to help him fill the parts without compensation. There was indeed a society of amateurs in the town who not only acted on the

dramatic stage, but occasionally also made a dash at a comic or even a grand opera. George Loudois, who was a very good elocutionist, was the leader of this society. He had already on several occasions demonstrated that he possessed a more than average histrionic talent. The amateurs had been for some time anxious for a chance to show themselves upon the professional stage, and now they received Couty's proposition with acclamations.

After they had played several comedies, in which the young Saint-Cyprianites acquitted themselves with more or less distinction, the tragedy of *Hernani* was put on. Couty was to play Ruy Gomez, his daughter Clara, Donna Sol, and George Loudois, *Hernani*. The other rôles were distributed equally between the professionals and the amateurs. The representation was given for the benefit of the poor.

It was a rainy night, but the little theatre, which was brilliantly lighted, was crowded to the doors. Madame de Carreuse, the Marquis of Jamaye, Monsieur and Madame Lugeol, the prefect and his wife, Victor Moulineau, Colonel Benjamin, and many others among the social dignitaries of the little town occupied the boxes. The ladies Loudois, accompanied by Rose and Prosper, entered their loge just as the curtain was rising.

Rose paid little attention to the opening

scene. But when Hernani appeared her interest was at once chained. George was greeted by the enthusiastic applause of the audience. He was dressed as an Arragonese mountaineer, with a leathern jerkin, a sword, dagger, and horn at the belt; over these was thrown a heavy mantle which the young man wore with the grace of a born prince.

He was very pale, and his langourous and amorous glances were often cast in the direction of the box in which his wife sat. Rose, knowing herself to be the one loved and desired by the handsome actor, felt her heart beat exultantly as she watched his young wife, who sat next to her, out of the corner of her eye. Marie, delighted at George's appearance, confided her previous fears to her companion.

"I was so afraid he might have stage-fright," she said.

Tears of pride came into father Loudois' eyes, while on the other side of the theatre Pouter Moulineau applauded frantically.

"Bravo! very good!" exclaimed the enthusiastic band-master. "He was made for the business. He is the only man in it. Bravo! bravo!"

Rose never took her eyes off Hernani. She had read the drama a hundred times. But she had never before experienced so peculiar an emotion over it. She followed the play eagerly, step by step, until the point where Donna Sol discov-

ers her lover in the garden beside the king, when she throws her arms about him, whilst Hernani gazes proudly and unflinchingly at Don Carlos.

"Good! Good, George!" exclaimed Madame Loudois the elder at this point.

"Damn that fellow George!" muttered Parent. "One would think he had graduated from the Conservatory. What fire he puts into it! Did you see, Rose, how he kept glancing in here? The real Donna Sol is you, Madame Marie."

"Hush!" said Rose, peevishly. "They are beginning again."

At the end of this act Rose felt as if transported into another, more beautiful world. George's voice sang in her heart. She felt with Donna Sol that a life of storm and danger was preferable to this monotonous existence which was killing her. Oh, how wrong she had been to send George away from her! It was to her, to her alone, that he played his part. Donna Sol's words of love were inscribed in her own great eyes; he might read them there if he chose. She imagined herself in some far-off land enacting with him the love-scene in which Hernani begs Donna Sol to run away with him. Tears of exquisite delight rose to her eyes. It seemed to her, as she looked upon the two standing there gazing with ecstasy into each other's very souls; blind to all the world beside, that she herself was the woman whom that beautiful cavalier held in

his arms. Ah, there never had been a man so splendid, so noble, so wholly lovable as George. An inward shiver passed through her being. Outwardly she remained as calm and composed by Prosper's side as if that worthy fellow had been Duke Gomez himself. Prosper leaned toward her presently and said,

"Is it not fine?"

"Yes."

"Are you suffering, dear? You look pale."

"It is the heat. Let us go out for a moment. It is stifling in here."

She fell upon the divan in the little room back of the box. The Loudois ladies hastened to her, while the theatre rang with the applause that greeted the end of the act and the fall of the curtain.

"I feel better now," she said.

She prayed the ladies to resume their places. They begged her to come back into the box, but she excused herself, saying that the heat of the theatre sickened her. Prosper would not leave her side. He sat holding her hand and caressing it from time to time.

"Please don't, Prosper."

"Will you go home now, Rose?"

"Not yet."

Still she would not remain until the end. She knew that George would come into the box in costume after the last act. He would be com-

pelled to be a little affectionate with his wife. This she could not bear to see. She made a sign to Prosper, who watched her anxiously.

“Let us go,” she whispered.

Prosper placed her sumptuous white satin opera-cloak upon her shoulders, and together they descended to their carriage. Arrived at home, they found Margaret asleep in front of the fireplace. Prosper kissed his wife good-night. As the kiss, impregnated with the fetid atmosphere of the theatre, fell upon her mouth, it felt to her irritated sense coarse, slobbery, nauseating.

“I can never love that man,” she said to herself as she fell upon her bed overcome with fatigue and disgust. Parent went away, and Rose heaved a great sigh of relief on finding herself alone in her room.

It was the evening next after the “Hernani” representation. Parent had gone with his old clerk to take down the last will and testament of a sick man at Mersay. Little Andrée was sleeping in her crib; the servants had long since gone to bed. Rose, who was feeling better, went out to enjoy a quiet promenade beside the hazel-hedge in the garden, when she was startled by the sudden appearance of a shadow on the other side of the wall, and her ears were saluted with,

“Madame Rose, Madame Rose!”

She held her peace.

Then the voice called louder,

"Madame Rose!"

She tried to speak, she tried to fly, but she could not. She remained rooted to the spot. In a moment George was by her side. He seized her hands and pressed them passionately to his lips. She tried to struggle against his influence, but there was no heart in her efforts. She moaned despairingly,

"Unhappy man!"

"Oh no. I am happy—blessed."

"For the love of God, sir, leave me. If you love me, do not work the ruin of my family. Think, I am a mother—"

"I have fought my mad passion as long as I can. Rose, it was here you counselled me to marry. It would cure me, you said. I have waited. I have struggled to do my duty. But the madness seizes me again and again. It is a daily conflict. I can struggle no longer. Marie is beautiful, you say, sweet, lovable. But it is you, Rose, you alone whom I love, whom I desire. When I talk with her, it is to you I speak. Her kisses, her tender speeches, make me sick. It is you, only you, whom I want, whom I will have."

Half unconscious, Rose listened to these broken sentences as she lay smothered beneath the storm of caresses, hot with a passion that had passed all

bounds, that fell upon her lips, her eyes, her hair, her throat. She could feel her lover's breast heave where she lay passive upon it. Slowly she felt herself drawn to a seat in the summer-house half hidden beneath the heavy foliage.

"My family are at the Bastides. I ran away on a false pretext. I said that I must go to Paris on business. I have been for two hours walking up and down here like a madman. I believed that God would have mercy on me. O Rose, come, come. We are alone. No one can see. Come, my worshipped one."

The young woman lay for a moment crushed upon her lover's bosom. Then with writhing hands and sobs of joy, while her hot flesh thrilled under his touch and her lips were wet with his kisses, she gave herself up to him utterly.

The white moon looked down upon her pale, transfigured face, upon the small head that trembled against the clematis vines, and upon the delicate body shaken with its first long shiver of ecstasy.

The next day about noon Prosper returned from Mersay. He found his wife at work in the garden. She was dressed in gray, with a black apron gracefully tied about her waist, and a big straw hat on her head. With a little trowel in her hand she was going up and down the paths, digging and pruning amid the rose-bushes. She presented her forehead to the marital salute.

How happy he was, the worthy fellow, he who had been forced the day before to tear himself away from his young wife, who was in such misery from her headache !

Rose laughingly showed her husband her hands filled with loam. Andrée, who was playing in the hallway, ran down to meet her father. Prosper was radiant. He had had a hard night at the sick man's bedside, but he had conscientiously done his duty, and now he felt recompensed by the happiness he experienced in again being in the bosom of his family.

"Business is looking up, Rose," he exclaimed. "Faure promises me a lot of sales. We shall soon be free from our small debts, dear, and we won't have to be begging the old folks."

On seeing him so pleased she felt a twinge of compunction.

"You are warm, dear. Don't stay out-doors. Come in the house."

Rose took his arm, little Andrée seized his coat-tail, and in this fashion the happy fellow permitted himself to be drawn in-doors.

After that Rose and George had frequent meetings, to which they called each other by secret signal. They exchanged photographs. She hid his in her bureau drawer between the folds of her underclothing. It was a portrait of him while in college. She thought him handsomer as he was now and more manly, but still she preferred the

other photograph, because thus pictured he appeared to have belonged to her longer. When she was alone she would take out her lover's portrait and devour it with kisses. He was her George, her own George, her beloved.

One day while they were awaiting the blessed hour of their meeting, after the Loudois ladies should have gone on a visit to Mersay, Rose had an inspiration. She warned George that she would meet him this time in his own chamber. And she did. In the full light of day, while Prosper was hard at work in his office, she climbed over the garden-wall and crept into the side door of the mayor's house. George was awaiting her at the head of the stairs.

"Father is in his room," he said; "he can't hear anything."

She glanced hurriedly out of the hall-window to see if any one was coming, then removed her slippers, and with them in her hand flew lightly up to him. He received her in his arms.

"Oh," she whispered, "how my heart beats!"

"My darling little wife!"

He drew her into his chamber, Marie's bridal chamber, all hung in light blue. She fell upon a sofa and began to stare about her.

"This is where you two pretend to make love, eh?" she said presently.

"Oh, never mind about her."

"Here is her engagement-ring," Rose con-

tinued, pouring into her hand the contents of a crystal box which she took from the dressing-table. "Poor little Marie—with her English air, and her slim figure, and her baby eyes. Truly, my dear, she is not the woman of your dreams. She isn't the kind that can turn a man's head, is she?"

Rose wreathed her arms about her lover's neck, and looked into his eyes with a saucy smile.

"I want to stay here with you some night. I am yours, my Hernani, am I not? I belong to you wholly. I watch your window from morning till night."

"My angel!"

She stayed with him a little while longer. Then she returned to her own garden, and during the rest of the day amused herself with her little daughter. They played "little mamma" together, each taking the part of mother in turn. They used nicknames: the mother was "mamma Grondin;" the daughter was "Miss Lily."

"Now, Andrée, it's your turn."

Then the child, imitating her mother, shook her little finger gravely, saying,

"Miss Lily, you have been naughty. You have eaten a pot of jam that I was keeping for dinner. I shall have to punish you."

"Pardon, mamma," whimpered Rose; "pardon, mamma Grondin."

"Tut, tut, tut! You always cry that."

"Mamma, please, little mamma."

“Very well, then; this time I forgive you. Come and kiss me, naughty Lily.”

Then Rose, making herself as small as possible, with puckered lips and outstretched arms would run to her little daughter, like one of those rosy-cheeked dolls that are exposed for sale in the shop-windows about holiday-time. Falling into Andrée’s arms, she would devour her with baby kisses, murmuring :

“I’s mamma’s Lily. Pretty mamma. I loves mamma wiz all my heart, mamma Grondin.”

The game would end in screams of laughter from both. Prosper followed these scenes with a lively interest. They amused him much. Sometimes Clapier would look on and as he thought of the disorder in the Parent household, the old man would murmur hoarsely,

“As much of a child as her baby. What a woman ! Good Lord, what a woman !”

Frequently in the summer evenings the Loudois and Parent families, with some other neighbors, would gather in front of the Parent house. George would play with Andrée, taking her on his back and running after his dog Medor, who would frisk along in front of them, barking, wagging his tail, and in other ways showing his appreciation of the game they were having.

“Come quick, Geordie,” the child would cry. She always called him Geordie.

Sometimes Rose would leave the group of ladies and join them, crying,

“Monsieur Loudois, you will fall. Andrée, my child, take care.”

Rose and her lover would exchange a few words in a low tone, the meaning of which the little girl was not able to grasp.

“Lift me, Geordie. You don’t run fast enough, Geordie. Get along, Geordie dear.”

“Isn’t our Andrée sweet?” Rose would murmur.

“It’s a shame she isn’t *ours*.”

“Some day, perhaps, we—Hush!”

“Geordie, you’ll buy me an umbrella like mamma’s, won’t you?”

“Yes, dear.”

“All embroidered, too?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Good Geordie. Now carry me away. Carry me away, I tell you.”

Rose rejoined the ladies. “Vintage-time will soon be here,” she said; “there will be a splendid harvest. My husband authorizes me to invite you all to Jarry’s Cross for a vintage-party. Eh, Prosper?”

“Why, of course, dear, if that will please you.”

“Very well. It is understood, is it, ladies and gentlemen?”

“When shall it be?” said Madame Loudois.

“I will tell you to-morrow. We will make pan-

cakes. No formality, you understand. Just a sort of go-as-you-please party. What do you say?"

All present accepted the invitation.

"Very good. Monsieur Moulineau will look after the weather, and Monsieur Loudois will be master of ceremonies."

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day Rose went to Jarry's Cross. She found her father at work fixing up his casks for the vintage. The great barn-doors were wide open, and she could see the old gentleman from the farm-house stoop busily engaged in tightening the hoops around a barrel. He had an old woollen nightcap on his head, and a leathern apron around his loins. As his sight was somewhat impaired by old age, he wore a big pair of silver spectacles. Every time he struck with his mallet, his glasses would jump on his nose, and at every third or fourth stroke the old fellow was obliged to stop and adjust them. Rose stole quietly into the barn and, without being perceived by him, stood watching her father busy over his task. A curious feeling of admiration for this old man, who could not divest himself of his life-habit of labor, stole over her. She watched him for some time with a strange smile on her face. Then she said briskly,

"Good-morning, father."

"Ah, little one," said Francis, turning at the sound of her voice, "how are you?"

"Very well, pa. And do you always work hard like that?"

"Oh, I've got to," the old man said, as he kissed her fondly. "I get tired if I don't work. How's the son-in law, and Andrée?"

"Thanks, I left them all well."

Berias spoke with an unusual degree of gentleness, because for several months there had been no question of borrowing between them. He could not get back the money he had already lent, but at least his last refusal had done some good. No more demands were made on his purse. Probably things were going better with the young people and they were becoming more prudent. At all events, they were paying their own expenses, and that was all Francis asked of them.

"You are dressed like a princess," was the old man's next remark.

"Oh, only cretonne at thirty cents a yard." Then as if to change a disagreeable subject she pointed to the cask upon which he was at work, saying, "It's a good vintage year, isn't it, pa?"

"Aha! and so you are becoming interested in the harvests again, eh? I feared you had outgrown all that."

"Oh, not at all. And by the same token, I've come to ask permission to bring some friends here next Monday."

"Some friends?"

"Yes. They want to try their hands at picking grapes."

Janette entered the barn at this moment.

"And, mamma, we want to make pancakes, too."

"Pancakes? Well, but think, my daughter, the kitchen will be full of the workmen whom we employ at the vintage."

"Then we can make them in my room."

"The fireplace isn't big enough, is it?"

"That makes no difference. We won't burn so much wood."

"Very well. Have your own way. We shall have some funny vintagers in your party, I'll be bound."

"Well, I should say so."

Accordingly, on the following Monday, Prosper and Rose with a dozen or so of their friends, most of whose names have already been mentioned in these pages, drove out to the White House and spent the afternoon in the vineyard. Marie, Rose, and Madame Lugeol looked especially pretty and picturesque as they picked the big bunches of grapes from the vines. They wore piquant little caps upon their heads, and had the skirts of their dresses coquettishly pinned back over their hips to avoid soiling them with the grape-juice. Pouter Moulineau and Colonel Benjamin amused themselves most of the afternoon by lying on their backs under the thick shade of the vines, smoking cigars and looking out for stray glimpses of supple ankles as the pretty women enthusiastically pursued the sport of filling the big baskets

with the luscious fruit. The "three Graces," as they were at once dubbed by Moulineau, were a source of great admiration also to the hired vintagers, male and female, who spent much valuable time staring at them and their performances, to the no small loss of Francis, who had to pay for it.

When they had sufficiently amused themselves in the vineyard, they adjourned to the house and to Rose's room. Here the ladies, amid much laughter and mutual rallyings, essayed to make edible pancakes. These attempts were equally picturesque and futile. The pretty cooks were unable to accomplish that dexterous "flip-flap" which is necessary to the successful crisping of the delicacy on both sides. Pancake after pancake fell spluttering on the coals, and Andrée with consternation saw the batter in the bowl gradually disappearing while she still remained pancakeless. Fortunately at this moment her grandmother entered the room and assumed the direction of affairs. In a quarter of an hour heaping platters of the delicately browned beauties, well buttered and sugared, were placed upon the table and the party made a merry if not a very hearty meal.

After this they took their departure. Places in the carriages were taken at haphazard ; nevertheless Rose and George found themselves alone together in the same vehicle. As the procession disappeared down the road into the twilight, Rose

quietly slipped her hand into that of her lover. Both were silent. There was no need of speech between them. They could converse with sufficient intelligence through the pores of their skin. Occasionally a call would come to them from another carriage. To this they would respond and then relapse at once into a delicious, eloquent silence. Rose's head fell languorously upon the back of the carriage-seat as she savored the evening breeze laden with sweet earthy smells. The gentle motion of the carriage as it rolled slowly along, the love-thoughts which rose from her heart but which her dumb lips dared not pronounce, the immeasurable silence which enwrapped them, the poplar trees drifting along by the roadside like dim ghosts, all combined to sink her in a dreamy intoxication. Her body sank more and more yielding against that of her lover. She was blissfully happy. It was so sweet to be so loved, to feel herself so wholly his !

Still, notwithstanding Rose was in this state of mind, she was at this time particularly gentle to her husband and thoughtful for his comforts. When he came back from a journey he would find his flannel night-vest and his night-shirt ready and warm for him by the kitchen fire. And she would come to his room bringing the kettle for his tea, saying sweetly as she entered,

“ Well, was the vest warm enough? I picked

out the softest night-gown I could find, to make you as comfortable as possible."

Then the next morning when he came to the breakfast-table and found his wife preparing some little dish on which she knew he doted, he would look down upon her bent head with such a feeling of devout gratitude stirring in his heart as brought the tears to his eyes.

"What a change is here!" he thought, "what undreamed-of happiness! How good God is!"

And about Rose's prodigality, he observed that that had altered also. After calculating his expenses for a quarter, he found that his wife had become quite economical indeed. How cheaply she bought things, too! Although she had never been to Paris, she was as familiar with city prices as the merchants themselves. They could not cheat her. All this talk of his friends about her extravagance was nonsense. She was not extravagant. She was economical, even. Cornet was an ass; Faure was an ass; they were all asses. Rose was queen of St. Cyprian, as she had been queen of Jarry's Cross. These people did not understand her because they did not love her.

The truth is that George Loudois had lavished enormous sums upon his mistress. At first the young woman felt herself revolted at this.

"Your proposal is shameful," she declared. "I don't want you to keep me. I give myself to

you freely, with my whole heart, because I love you."

"Don't be foolish," he urged. "You don't understand. For whose sake do you love to make yourself beautiful, my darling?"

"For yours, of course; you know that."

"Precisely. Then you must not ruin your husband. If fate had been kind, you would have been my wife. It is my duty to provide for your happiness. Perhaps, Rose, some day—"

"Oh!"

"Why, don't you wish it?"

"Don't speak to me like that," she exclaimed fiercely, with a sudden strange smile. "You put mad thoughts into my brain."

"I was wrong. We must not desire any one's death. We are compelled to love in secret, since we may not love in the pure light of day. But, for God's sake, don't refuse to let me provide for you. It is one of my greatest pleasures. You need not fear for my purse. I am very rich."

"And your wife?"

"She has a fortune of her own. My wealth is my own. And all that I have is yours, my beautiful one."

Rose thereupon wrote to Paris for such clothes as she desired. About the price of these she lied to her husband. Still the expenses of the Parent household were considerably in excess of the office income. But the world did not know this. The

notary had begun a system of false book-keeping to conceal his impending ruin.

It was difficult to collect what was due him, he said. Many thousand francs were owed to him which would come in some day. The old clerk, Clapier, who was book-keeper also, though he kept his mouth shut so far as the public was concerned, was always remonstrating with his employer.

"I tell you, sir, you are doing wrong. I ought not to speak to you so, perhaps. But I can't bear to see you ruin yourself."

"Please, my dear fellow, stop right there. You are mistaken. That's enough."

"I am not mistaken, I tell you. Look at the books."

"Don't they show that our expenses are decreasing?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders in despair.

"Very well, sir," was all he said. "I have warned you, remember."

Then he would resume his work, not daring, in the presence of his master's frown, to speak of all that he had it in his mind to say. He knew that scandal had already coupled the names of Rose and George. But he dared not destroy the peace of a good man by exposing to his eyes the terrible truth. Besides, the notary would not believe him, and he would be discharged for his pains. Sometimes he would appeal to Monsieur

Cornet, who would straightway undertake to convince him that his suspicions were not well founded.

"How's business?" the judge would say, entering the notary's office.

"First-rate. Faure promises me a fine sale next week. By the by, that money that I owe you—now—er—can you—?"

"Nonsense, my dear Prosper! Don't speak of it. We don't want it. We live so quietly down in the country, we don't need it."

"But—"

"Are you going to put on airs with me?"

The worthy man did not even call for the interest on the amount originally due him from Parent. Besides which the latter had more than once found himself obliged to squeeze his old friend's purse for living expenses.

"Oh, what of it?" the judge would say to his wife. "I love the boy. He is like the apple of my eye. He has a heart of gold. I brought him up."

"Might as well do it first as last," his wife would continue, approvingly. "He'll get it all some day anyway. Besides, Prosper and Rose love us dearly. Lately, when I had sciatica, Rose passed two whole nights watching over me."

"She's a good woman. All this gossip is hateful."

"You don't believe a word of it, do you, husband?"

"No. What! George, Prosper's intimate friend? childhood friends? brothers, more like?"

"The St. Cyprian people don't know how to do anything but talk scandal. I had a pitched battle about it with Madame de Mersay."

"Does she believe it?"

"I think so."

"Very good. Then I say with Madame de Carreuse that virtuous women never believe in the peccadilloes of others."

The Loudois family were obliged to spend much time at the Bastides on account of the continued ill-health of Marie's aunt. The young woman herself had put aside the suspicions that were at one time beginning to cloud her mind when she saw Rose so fond of and attentive to her husband.

"George, dear," she said, with her arm about her husband's neck, "I am so sorry I bothered you with my foolish questions the other day. Will you forgive me?"

When the family had gone, George and Rose were left to pursue their liaison with perfect impunity. They generally met by the garden-hedge. The chirping of the birds in the branches, the rustling of the wind through the leaves, now just beginning to be touched by Autumn's brush, no longer caused them to start in guilty fear. They

argued that they had a perfect right to belong to one another. In their fool's paradise, they invented excuses for their conduct. They formed a thousand projects for their future happiness, and dreamed of a life together in some far-off land of love and mystery. In such moments of exaltation Rose would suddenly jump to her feet as if moved by a spring. Then she would walk slowly up and down for a moment, and stopping before her lover, still as a graven image, she would say, with a labored slowness that betrayed the tumult in her mind,

“Oh, if I had not my daughter!”

She would smile maliciously when her eyes rested upon the Loudois house, once so sad and sombre, which had taken on a festive air ever since the marriage. The young cousin had come into it as a bride, producing in it the effect of a swallow flying into a school-room window on a fine spring morning.

Marie was eighteen years old and as laughter-loving as a school-girl. Far from having tainted the native sweetness of her character, her lonely life at the Bastides seemed to have engendered in her a desire not to appear sad. She would take her husband with her into the woods where she had so often wandered as a girl. She would make him climb the hills where she had lain book in hand; and often while the birds sang love-songs to each other in the tops of the poplars and

the larches, they, with hearts filled with the delight of being young, would penetrate into some pretty glade carpeted with velvety moss, through which ran a purling brook, on whose banks the trees were full of bird's nests. Each shadow had a memory for her. It was down there by the big oak trees that she had first seen George when he paid his first love-making visit to dear Aunt Varennes in the country. How handsome he had looked! Something had told her that it was for her he came, and at once she had felt herself his very own.

Poor little foolish thing, how she had suffered the night George made love to Rose at the ball! She had stayed awake all night, a prey to the most cruel fears. Happily George had only to say one word and to give her one kiss; it was enough to exorcise the horrible dread at once. Doubtless she thought she was not used to the ways of the world; she ought not to suspect a Christian woman who was a good and loving mother.

At the Bastides, when the sounds of the little villa were hushed in the night so that one could hear the washing of the waves on the near river and the sougling of the breeze through the trees on the highway, the two young people loved to talk over their bridal trip to Italy. They saw themselves again in Venice, gliding along in their gondola, over the shining waters; or at Naples,

at the doorway of some splendid cathedral crowded with ragged lazzaroni; or at Rome, the holy city, where their honeymoon had reached its zenith-point. If George wished, they might always stay at the Bastides; her aunt would be so glad to have them come and live with her. There, surrounded by the simple life of the country, they could love each other more securely amid the fields enamelled in green and gold, and amid the shady depths of the wild wood.

These had been the young girl's dreams. Rose was quite aware of them, and she did not forgive them.

CHAPTER X.

"YOU are not very cheerful," said George's mother to Marie one day.

"I haven't been feeling very well lately."

"Ha, ha!" laughed father Loudois, with a roguish wink. "It is my pretty little grandson, I suspect."

But it was not that alone. The young girl had been happy enough, until all at once some mysterious cloud seemed to have darkened her life.

It was the beginning of winter. The trees in the garden were stripped of their leaves, which now whirled at their feet in brown eddies, like a band of russet-colored imps dancing round a May-pole. The flowers had all been removed to the greenhouse. The fruit-trees stretched their bare branches up to heaven as if begging for a new life. The weather at Saint Cyprian had been dark and threatening for a week. It was as if Nature frowned upon the little town for some peccadillo it had committed. Madame Carreuse had gone back to Paris. Her son-in-law, the sub-prefect, and his wife were installed at a fashionable winter resort. The few ladies who remained at Saint Cyprian had shut themselves up for the winter.

George Loudois had been out all day shooting at the Jamaye château. Marie, wrapped in a big black cloak, was getting ready to go out. As she carefully put on her gloves she cast anxious glances at the sky. Tears were in her eyes; she seemed suffering from some intolerable anguish.

It was very cold. The hoar-frost lay thick upon the ground. The young woman hesitated a moment. Then going to her mother-in-law, she said:

"I'm going out for a little—not far—only to Madame Parent's."

"I don't think you ought to expose yourself, my dear. This weather is terrible."

"I am very warmly clad."

"Well, be careful, love."

Rose received her visitor cordially.

"How kind of you to think of me!" she said. "Sit here by the fire, dear, and put your feet on this footstool."

The two young women took seats on opposite sides of the fireplace.

"We are becoming very sad, aren't we?" was Rose's first remark.

Marie half unconsciously repeated the words. "Very sad."

"We Saint Cyprianites, I mean," continued Rose. "Why, how pale you are, child! You aren't cold, are you? The room is quite warm."

"Madame Parent," began her visitor, "I have come to talk to you about a very serious matter."

"A very serious matter? Oh, for my husband, no doubt. Count on me. I shall be glad to help you. I suppose it is some matter of business of Monsieur Loudois'."

Rose leaned back on the sofa, stretched her pretty slippered foot out on a footstool, and, with her graceful head leaning on her hand, sat waiting. But Marie did not speak at once. The words seemed to stick in her throat. Presently she mastered her diffidence and exclaimed,

"I can't bear it any longer. I am humiliated—crushed with shame. I have come to you to talk with you, without passion, as calmly as I can, to appeal to you as a mother, a wife, and a Christian—to say to you that you are breaking my heart; for—O my God!—my husband loves you—you love him."

Marie had risen and stood paling and reddening with alternate shame and terror. She expected an outburst of anger on the part of Rose. Instead, her ears were greeted with a peal of laughter.

"Oh, how funny! how very droll! Who in the world told you that nonsense?"

"No one. I saw with my own eyes."

"With your own eyes? Oh! ha, ha, ha!"

"Do not insult me, you wicked woman. And do not try to deceive me. I saw you, how you talked to George when you were dancing so immodestly with him at the sub-prefect's. Since

then George is no longer as he used to be. His heart is elsewhere. It is with you. I know it, madame. Do not contradict me. Only last night in his sleep he murmured your name. O you bad, bad woman!"

Then, as Rose still continued to laugh at her, the poor little creature fell on her knees before her rival, in an ecstasy of despair.

"Have pity on me," she prayed. "I am only a child. I am not strong. By whatever you hold most sacred; in the name of your child; in God's name, have pity on my weakness. I know it was you who advised George to marry me. You did not know me then. You could have no reason for hating me. Pity me. You are killing me."

Rose raised the child from the ground. As she did so a look of sincere commiseration flashed across her face.

"You are not well," she said. "Your brain is filled with phantoms that do not exist. There, there, sit down. Lean your head on the back of the sofa. Let me wipe your eyes. Don't speak for a moment."

"Oh, how I suffer!"

"You are a child—a school-girl. If I were not fond of you I should be very angry at you. You have spoken without thinking. Aren't you already sorry for what you have said?"

Marie gazed yearningly into the eyes of the woman who leaned caressingly over her. The

look that met her own was so loyal, so gentle, so motherly in its tenderness that the young girl burst into tears.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you are right! I am ill—crazy. Forgive me, madame. I love him so. They talk so wickedly in these little towns. I listened to their scandal. But it is not true, is it? When George kisses me at night he is thinking alone of me, is he not? Yes, I know he is. I am only making myself miserable for nothing. Forgive me, oh, forgive me!"

"My dear, love wouldn't be worth anything without a little jealousy," said Rose, pleasantly, seeing herself mistress of the situation. "But you oughtn't to suspect your best friend—to cast a slur upon an honest mother. Never mind. It's all over. Come here, you child, and let me kiss you—there on that brow, which was just now all ruffled with such unjust anger."

After this they had a long confidential talk. Madame Parent thought that life was dull at Saint Cyprian. As for her, she was going to get up some dancing-parties with her old schoolmates.

Marie on her side whispered that she did not like gayety; her aunt used to call her Cinderella, and now George had adopted the nickname.

"Do you read much?" asked Rose.

"No, not much. Fashion papers and such things."

"If you want to amuse yourself, I have some jolly novels I'll lend you."

"Auntie doesn't like me to read novels."

"Nonsense, my dear! I admit that young girls, perhaps, ought not to read them. It might put too many naughty thoughts in their heads. But a married woman ought to be informed; and novels give one ideas. They tell you how to make yourself loved, adored."

"Do they?" asked Marie, round-eyed and blushing slightly.

"Certainly they do. Besides, you don't have to believe everything you read in them. Only they serve to allure the mind above the ordinary, the commonplace, the conventional. You needn't read them at the expense of your household duties. But in the evening when you are alone, when your husband is at the club—he does go to the club, doesn't he?"

"Yes, but only since the last few weeks."

"Then curl yourself up in a nice easy chair with a good novel and dream the evening away. Oh, I tell you you will enjoy it. When I was a girl I used to read novels without half understanding them. Now I read them over again with a new pleasure. At the seminary, Miss Laura, one of the teachers, used to lend us novels—the yellow-covered sort. We used to read them in the dormitory after the teachers had gone to sleep."

"Weren't you punished?"

"Oh, we used to hide them until after Madame Castel had made her last round at half-past eight. Dear old thing, I can see her now, with her big velvet hat with flying strings. She would say, 'Young ladies, I shall confiscate any novel found in the dormitory.' But as soon as she had gone out, any number of novels would make their appearance. Dear me, how I gossip! Didn't your aunt let you have any books?"

"Oh yes: books of travel and some religious books."

"Over which you went to sleep, I dare say. That's all right for girls. But a married woman, as I say, ought not to appear ignorant. I have just got a story about country-life, about just such women as you and I. Oh, there's a love-scene in it to make your mouth water. Wouldn't you like to borrow it? I will send it over to you."

"All right, I'll read it. But I must go now," said Marie, rising. "It's time for George to be home. I was very unhappy when I came here, dear madame, but you send me away quite reassured. Will you let me kiss you?"

"With all my heart. Ah, now it's my turn."

"How good you are!"

"Don't you see how wrong you were to entertain those naughty suspicions? Ah, jealousy is a wretched, wretched fault

"You are the very best of women. Good-by, good-by."

When George got back from the château, Marie received him with open arms.

"How good you are not to leave me alone for long," she said tearfully.

"What is it, Marie?"

"Let me speak. Don't interrupt me, George. Oh, I have been so wicked! Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?"

"Yes. I have sinned—I have sinned."

"Eh?"

"You will forgive me?"

"Well, what have you done, little one? I must know what the fault is. Ah, you wish to try my confidence in you, eh? Well, go ahead. I warn you that it is very great."

"Oh, it is I, husband, who have lacked in confidence."

George repressed a sudden start at this speech. Then taking Marie's arm in his, he listened to her confession.

"O my angel-girl, how you must have suffered!" he murmured. "Ah, it was terrible. But how wrong of you to be jealous of me!"

His wife continued her story, her eyes radiant with joy. George's simple word was enough for her.

"It is because I am all yours, my darling hus-

band," she exclaimed. "When you are not with me it seems as if my heart left me and went with you. It is so beautiful, our pure honorable love, George. Oh, don't you remember our wedding journey? One evening—don't you recollect?—we could do nothing but gaze at each other, without speaking a word."

"You are an enchantress," murmured George, kissing her forehead.

"No, not there. Are you afraid of my lips?"

"Sweet rogue, there."

She lay for a long time on his breast, babbling of the pure delights of wedded love, ashamed of her former fears, and humbly begging again and again to be forgiven. George was overcome by this spectacle of wifely obedience and affection. He pressed her passionately to him, and swore in his teeth that he would banish Rose at once and forever from his mind.

"I am about to become a father," he murmured to himself. "I will also become an honest man."

With the first winter frost Rose's beauty increased marvellously. She was pale with that marble pallor which lends an air of wantonness to the majesty of Italian statues. Scarcely the smallest dash of red relieved the brilliant whiteness of her skin. When she smiled, her dazzling teeth gleamed between the most ravishing dimples. And the marvellous beauty of the face was reflected in the depths of her great dark eyes, which changed

their shading from time to time with the alternations of feeling that took place in the brain behind them. When the love-light shone in them they took a bluish tinge. In anger it was as if sparkles of reddish fire came from them. Then when all feeling had been banished from the mind, the eyes remained with only a pensive calmness showing in their dark depths. Ordinarily the heavy hair was confined in a silken net. But the whiteness of the neck and the blue veins on the temples were shaded by little tendrilly locks, silky and wavy, vagabond tresses much admired by Prosper. The pink and almost transparent nostrils seemed to dilate with each passing thought, and the rosy mouth wore the strange, sphinx-like smile that Leonardo has given to the lips of his Joconda.

One day as she was playing with Andrée in her room, the little one called her attention to George, who was passing in the street. She sent the child away to her nurse, and going to the window made a signal. George stopped at once, scratched his head as if he had forgotten something, and then retraced his steps to his own house. Rose in the mean time had traversed the garden and was in his room, waiting for him.

"Your wife is at the Bastides?" she asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"Never mind. She is a funny little thing, your wife. She is the kind that ought to drink tea and

read the Bible. By the way, has she read the novels I sent over to her?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know! Why, a husband should know everything his wife does."

"But I only love you," said George, coming toward her. Rose laughingly shunned him and continued to walk up and down the room. She opened the bureau drawers, criticised the linen, smelled at the toilette-bottles and then turned up her nose. She felt herself quite at home in the presence of the nuptial bed, and composedly scattered about the thousand and one nothings that women delight in.

"Let us see," she said. "You say you love me and me alone. What proof have I of it? You need not think I am jealous of your wife. Bah! If she bothered me I'd crush her like a fly. No. Marie doesn't worry me at all. It is those women, more beautiful than either of us, whom you know in Paris and about whom you are continually dreaming."

"Rose!"

"Oh, you can't fool me. Your wife has nothing to complain of, since she thinks you belong entirely to her. But it is different with me. When I gave myself to you, I said good-by to my honor and laughed at my shame. If I am a lost woman, I don't care. I wished to be. So tell me about the beauties of the capital and their

splendid toilettes and gorgeous houses. We have plenty of time to talk. My husband is at work in his office. He is earning money, poor man. Tell me, how do they dress, the Parisian women? Better than I, eh? Still this dress came from one of the most fashionable modistes in Paris. Perhaps my walk doesn't suit you. Or I ought to be blonde instead of brunette. But, see, I don't use paints and powders. My hair grows on my head. I don't use any black under my eyes to make them bigger. Oh, you do not love me!"

"I not love you? My God!"

"No, I tell you. A man in love sacrifices all for his love. Do I reflect and consider when I come here at any hour you want me? Supposing we were caught. It would be a fine feather in your cap, eh? But think what it would be for me. Ah, no; you do not love me."

"Stop! What proof do you demand of my love? I worship you, Rose." And the young man crushed her passionately to him and pressed a long kiss upon her moist red lips.

"I want to go away. Take me away from here. I can't bear longer to play this infamous comedy with the woman who wears your name. It is too much. I am ashamed of myself. Let us go. Take me to Paris, where we can live together forgotten by all. I will be as beautiful as the greatest toast in town."

"And your daughter, Rose?"

"We can fetch her later. Do you hesitate? Oh, unhappy wretch that I am!"

"It will be the ruin of our families. It will kill my mother."

"Perhaps. But we must suffer all things for love's sake. Are you the only one of us two who will make sacrifices by the way?"

"You meditate our eternal unhappiness."

"Very well. Let us break off. I'll kill myself. What will you do then?"

"I cannot live without you."

"And do you think I am going to continue living this galley-slave's life? I have a heart in my body, and it makes me sick to be continually deceiving my husband under his very nose. George, you have taken me for your own, and you have destroyed me. I had some religion once. For you I gave up my prayers. For you my mother's love, which inspires the hearts even of bad women, has almost been blotted out. Oh, I am a thing accursed!"

"I cannot—dare not go," he groaned.

"Is it on account of your child that is coming? Perhaps God may kill him before he is born. If he is born alive, I will come myself and drag him for you from his mother's arms."

"You are mad—mad."

"The hyenas, even, never abandon their young. But I do. When I see you there before me, my worshipped one, my eyes grow blind to everything

else. I am ready to abandon my baby—my little Andrée. See, I am worse even than the hyenas.”

How beautiful she was in her frenzy of self-abasement and renunciation! George felt himself fascinated and dominated by those eyes now sparkling with red flame, anon melting into deep, dark azure. She stood there, her arms outstretched, the glorious eyes suffused with tears. Her bosom heaved convulsively. It was no longer a supplication, it was a command.

“I am conquered,” he murmured. “I am thine, O Rose, my beloved!”

The blond head fell upon the woman’s heaving bosom, and she, standing still and calm, supported him as were he a little child. Proud of her victory over him, she continued to murmur little tender coaxing phrases into his ear. Her voice assumed a humble tone. It was as if she were trying to conceal from her lover the air of authority which his weakness had enabled her to assume toward him.

A few dim stars were beginning to shine in the heavens, and the trees were commencing to look vague in the darkness, when Rose, turning the corner of the green-house, came face to face with Monsieur Faure.

“Hullo, Madame Parent!” exclaimed the old gentleman, “how you scared me!”

“Ah, Monsieur Faure, have you been here some time?” asked Rose, somewhat embarrassed.

"About half an hour. Prosper is still in the office. It is devilishly warm in there. But don't you fear the cold yourself, madame?"

"Madame? Oh, monsieur, that is not friendly of you. And you have known me ever since I was a child."

"You are grown up now."

"What difference does that make?"

"I don't know. One's habits change, you know."

"You ought not to change to me. I am always your friend."

They entered the dining-room, where Prosper joined them and insisted on the old gentleman's staying to dinner. The merchant evidently had something on his mind. After dinner he stayed with Rose instead of following her husband into the office. After a few moments of silence he rose, and taking a turn up and down the room, stopped before the young wife and said,

"Rose—I will call you so since you wish it—Rose, you are doing wrong."

"Sir!"

"Yes, wrong, I say."

"Sir, I will not permit you to—"

"It is ruin, I tell you, and at short date too—the ruin of your family—bankruptcy, do you hear?"

He grasped her arm and shook her.

"I love you as if you were my own, and I tell

you your husband is plunging toward bankruptcy."

"You are tragic, Monsieur Faure."

Having expected something entirely different, she rapidly recovered her composure, and now scarcely deigned to notice the angry little man.

"I know," he continued, "that I am attending to other people's business in this. But it is for your sake and Prosper's and Andrée's that I beg you to listen to me. It is absolutely necessary that you cut down the household expenses. Your servants alone cost God knows what. If you are careful you can retrench in a single year enough to save you. You love your husband, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"By Jove! there's not another fellow of his quality in the place. Rose, be reasonable; be economical. Prosper will yet be the happiest of men."

"Is that all? Then you can tell Prosper to rest in peace. I will be the most prudent of women."

Monsieur Faure was strangely deceived when he said that a year's retrenchment would straighten out the affairs of the Parent household. Prosper had got into the habit, when he signed notes for the sums he was obliged to borrow, of telling the lenders that the moneys were intended for young men of family who were in Paris studying law. Little by little he had begun to convert to his own

use moneys placed with him for investment. His wife was always on the lookout for something new to buy, and if the money was not forthcoming she would get into a violent rage.

"It is my marriage-portion that I want," she would cry.

One day she wanted a new dress to wear to the wedding of an old-school friend. This time Prosper refused her absolutely.

"No," he said, "it is madness. I cannot do it. We have a daughter. Rose, I beg of you, do not insist."

Whereupon she bounced out of her chair, threw her embroidery in his face, and shut herself in her room for two days, a prey to a violent nervous attack. In the end he had to go and beg her pardon, accompanied by Madame Cornet, to whom he had confided his troubles. But as soon as the notary had once begun to yield to the temptation of using his trust funds, Rose's prodigality knew no bounds. A grand piano was substituted for the old square one. New curtains and draperies were ordered for the whole house, and a beautiful new set of drawing-room furniture was purchased. Two handsome chestnuts from the stables of Count de la Durantière took the place of the old cob which had formerly sufficed. The old covered buggy which dated from Cornet times was relegated to an obscure corner of the carriage-house, and for it was substituted a landau upholstered in

delicate blue, which became the admiration of all Saint Cyprian. Andrée was dressed in the latest Parisian mode. The father, throwing figures to the winds, felt his heart thrill with pride at these exhibitions of his wife's elegant taste.

"You were born to live in a château," he would murmur admiringly.

Sometimes the notary would come to his wife's room, radiant, tiptoeing in so as to surprise her over her novel. Holding his hands behind him, he would exclaim,

"I have made a find, Rose."

Probably that very morning she had wished for money for some new purchase, and now he was bringing it to her.

"What have I got? Guess."

She always guessed right, because he had accustomed her to the game. Then he would drop the money between the pages of her book while she went on reading. The poor fellow would be delighted if she tossed him a careless

"Thank you, Prosper."

But he dared never venture on a caress. Several times she had repulsed him.

"I am not feeling well," she would say. "You annoy me. We can love each other without behaving like children, can't we?"

Sometimes he would sit down by her and tell her how lucky it was that that money had come to him when it did. A client whom he supposed in-

solvent had all of a sudden appeared with money and paid him when he least expected it. Then Rose would feel touched by her husband's kindness, and she would reward him by a kiss upon the cheek.

"Encore, encore!" he would murmur. "The left cheek will be jealous."

The notary carried about his office the demeanor of a man who was quite contented with his lot. But the old clerk was not deceived. Clapier knew the number of the office creditors and the aggregate of the deposits. One evening he said to his employer,

"Monsieur Parent, this will all end badly. The money you are spending does not belong to you. Your wife is ruining you."

"Clapier," exclaimed the notary, red with anger, "how dare you talk to me like that! Whatever I take you may be sure I can replace."

And the old clerk would bow his head in silence, not wishing to abandon his friend at a moment like this, when he knew ruin was directly impending. So things continued until one day when Prosper exclaimed to Monsieur Faure,

"My wife has become really economical. She buys beautiful things, but they cost almost nothing. That's what comes of buying in Paris. Oh, there's nothing like Paris."

George Loudois bore nearly all of the expenses

of his mistress. Prosper was called on for only small amounts.

“Poor man!” said Rose to her lover, “we make him pay for it, though, with his honor, eh?”

What a comedy is this life of ours!

CHAPTER XI.

ONE day not long afterwards Rose was gazing listlessly out of her boudoir window. Notwithstanding the fire on the hearth, the hoarfrost lay thick upon the window-pane. Rose had melted this in spots with her hands, and through the holes thus made she could plainly see as far as the end of the garden. Presently the gate opened and a man appeared through the bare branches of the berry-bushes that grew along the garden-wall.

It was hardly four o'clock in the afternoon, but it was already dusk. Rose hastily descended the stairs. George awaited her but a few steps from the door.

"Oh, how good of you to come!" she exclaimed, throwing herself into his arms. "Prosper will not be back until to-morrow. I am alone. And you, my adored one?"

"Alone, too."

"Come, then."

Slowly they mounted the stairs together with arms closely interlaced, stopping several times on the way to exchange long passionate kisses.

"Crazy!" exclaimed Rose when they were safe in her room. "Yes, I am crazy. Your long ab-

sence was killing me. I am a wicked woman. I am a bad, unchristian mother. I have tried to feel for my child that maternal love which inspires all mothers. But I cannot. I used to kneel before the Virgin and pour out my heart to her, and sometimes I thought that she consoled me. But now you possess my every thought. We are going away at last, are we not, my precious one? We can devote ourselves to each other with no one to hinder. I don't care for anything, I, except that you shall not find me pretty enough for you."

"My darling girl!"

"Listen," she continued, striving to restrain her ardor. "You must not deceive me. I am not like other women. I am sick with love. Sometimes my reason wanders, I think. My mad passion draws me toward you in spite of myself. I call God to witness that I cannot help myself. I have deceived my husband without caring whether I sinned or not. If your heart is no longer mine, mine alone, you must tell me so now, at once. I will make Prosper go into business in some other city. I shall at least not have to reproach myself with your ruin."

"It is very sweet to be so loved, Rose," murmured George. "To-morrow we will fly."

"And you are not sorry?" She looked at him jealously.

"No."

"Everything is ready?"

"Yes."

"And your wife?"

George's face paled slightly. The question thus hurled in his face at such a time caused him a sharp twinge of compunction.

"My wife is at the Bastides. She seemed happy when I saw her last. Ah, well! she will have time enough for tears."

"How you shiver! I have hurt you. Let me kiss away the hurt."

She held him in a close embrace, caressing him passionately.

"You are not angry with me?"

"No, no. After all, it is you who are making the greater sacrifices."

"Let us speak no more about that, please. Dear, it is getting late. Until to-morrow, then."

"Good-night."

Rose hastily got together whatever was necessary for her journey, and placing the things in a portmanteau, gave it to George, who hid it in the hedge. The next morning at three o'clock she arose. The house was still as death. The night-lamp shone dully upon Andrée's little cot. The night before the child had gone to bed joyous from the unaccustomed tenderness of her mother's kiss. Rose bent over her for a moment, watching the gentle rising and falling of the child's chest in its deep slumber. All at once

she started. A picture of the Virgin, holding the blessed Child in her arms, hung on the wall above the cradle. As Rose gazed upon her own child a sudden impression of grief seemed to contract the features of the mother of Christ. This fearful impression held possession of the erring woman's senses until she saw the carriage stop in the deserted street. As she stole out to it, it seemed to her as if the dense silence would strangle her. The shadows from the neighboring house seemed never to have been so black and threatening before. She placed her hand upon her heart to still its beating. Then the carriage-door opened, and the next moment she was in her lover's arms.

Prosper had gone to Pensol on important business. He had gone away with a light heart. Rose had never been so sweet and good before. She had gone to the train with him, and though not at all demonstrative by nature, as he knew, she had there kissed him warmly good-by, telling him to be careful of himself while he was away, and not pretending to dissimulate the grief she felt at his departure.

The next day at eleven o'clock a cab stopped in front of the Parent door, from which the notary descended to learn the news of his dishonor. No one knew precisely what had happened, except that the runaways had been recognized in their carriage by some one who had passed them on

the high-road. George's wife had arrived, her face ghastly with horror, and going into Rose's empty room, had fallen upon the floor like one dead, with just one great cry of agony and despair. Afterwards she had been taken, still unconscious, to her own home.

The notary looked around upon the abandoned room, the tumbled bed, the garments scattered here and there in the haste of departure, the open drawers of the bureau, the closet with its yawning doorway, the blue eider-down quilt half dragged upon the floor. Here were a pair of stockings and a chemise. There a night-gown still warm from his wife's body was thrown carelessly over a chair. A dreadful smile distorted the poor fellow's face. Leaning his burning forehead upon the cold marble of the mantel, he made a sign with his hand that he would be alone.

Andrée came to the door. Her father turned and looked at her. Seeing him so pale, she stood still, glancing timidly up at him. Prosper took her in his arms and gazed at her earnestly.

"Poor child!" he murmured, "you have no longer a mother."

"Mamma," she lisped.

"Your mother is dead."

"Dead?" and the child burst into tears.

"I am here still, dear."

"Mamma, mamma!"

"Do not cry—do not cry."

"Mamma is dead. Oh, I must see her. Last night she gave me such a dear kiss—and George too. Where is she? Papa, I want my mamma. Mamma, mamma!"

"Andrée, my darling daughter, go down to Margaret. You don't want to worry papa, do you? He is very, very unhappy."

The Beriases, who had been sent for by Monsieur Faure, soon arrived. Judge Cornet tried to devise some means of inspiring a hope that the story might not be true.

"No," said Francis, raging, "it is no use talking. Rose is no better than a street-walker. And as for your Loudois, the villain, I will break his back when I meet him. And besides being dishonored we are ruined. Ah, well, it will kill me. I shall never survive it. I don't want to. Prosper, we will wring that damned seducer's neck and throw his carcass to the hogs, eh? The scoundrel! And I have worked like a dog all my life for this. Oh, God is not just. No, God is not just."

"Be silent, father," said Janette. "Rose is mad. That man has bewitched her. But she will come back. Or I will go to the ends of the earth after her. Poor little Andrée! Oh, what a dreadful thing! My God, what a dreadful thing!"

"The law is on your side, Prosper," murmured the judge.

"The law? Yes, I know."

"You can have her brought back."

"Never. She is dead to me."

"I will go to Paris," continued Janette. "Rose is there. I've often heard her speak of that wicked city."

"No, no," said Prosper, "don't speak to me of her any more. You are killing me. Don't you see you are killing me?"

"Courage, Prosper," said the judge. "Think of your weeping child, who loves you and who still remains to you."

"Yes, I will have courage. I know I am a father. That is my first duty. O God, how I suffer! Why are we all here? Have I committed some crime? Say, have I? Oh, I shall go mad!"

Janette was caressing Andrée.

"You shall come to the farm with us," the old woman said. "I will take care of you, and we shall love each other dearly."

"Grandma, I must have a black dress like that one Lucie Berger wore when she lost her papa."

Young Madame Loudois had been taken to her own home, where she had at last recovered consciousness. The extent of the misfortune was still greater to her. How happy her life had been at the Bastides! At this solemn moment she seemed to see as in a mirage the great sycamore trees in which the birds she used to love still sang for her their sweet songs. How many dear plans for their future life she had devised under those spreading branches! And then her mind dwelt upon that last talk she had had with the infamous

woman, from which she had come with such a lightened heart. And soon she would become a mother. Her child was coming into the world with the stigma of shame upon him. He would learn of his father only to hate and curse him.

Aunt Varennes could not console her niece. It was she who had advised the marriage. Now she was plunged into the depths of despair. She wished to carry Marie away with her to the Bastides. But the young girl did not think she ought to abandon George's father and mother, until old Madame Loudois, who had been praying all day, counselled her to go.

"The sight of this house will kill you by inches," she said. "You are still our daughter, and we love you dearly. We will come and mourn with you."

That evening Marie sent over and asked to see Prosper. She said to herself that it was her duty to do something to console the unhappy man, who they said was meditating suicide. The notary came to her, alone, by the old garden-path that the lovers had used to take, just as dusk was descending upon the town. His brow was all corrugated with the intense mental struggle through which he had been passing. When Marie took his two hands in hers with an almost filial reverence, his great chest shook with a mighty sob. Then he stood still and red before her, like a big child who has been unjustly punished but who feels that he has no right to complain.

CHAPTER XII.

ARRIVED at Paris, the runaways drove to a private hotel, where they registered as Monsieur and Madame de Magnac, a name suggested by George as having a decidedly respectable and even aristocratic sound. Rose thought that "Count and Countess de Magnac" would look much better, and her companion had some difficulty in persuading her out of the idea.

"My dear," he remonstrated, "it seems to me that under the circumstances it would be quite as well not to attract attention to ourselves."

It was late when they rose from their first dinner in Paris—too late to go to the theatre. So they went out to walk upon the boulevard, like a plain pair of newly-married country people. Rose was delighted with the brilliancy of the streets, and amazed by the throngs of people who brushed past her under the gaslights. She pressed closely to her lover's side, declaring that she felt afraid of being recognized by some one in the crowd. Amid all this mass of people there might well be some from the neighborhood of their old home. George quieted her by telling her that everybody they met was busy attending to his own business

and was not at all interested in the affairs of any one else. No one was bothering himself about her. Besides, if they should chance upon a meeting with any of the old Perigord people, it would be easy enough to throw them off the track. He told her she would soon get used to the noise and bustle of the city. When he had first come up to Paris himself as a student he had been unable to sleep on account of the uproar in the streets. But soon this had become a regular lullaby to him.

"How I should have loved to be with you here when you were studying law," exclaimed Rose, hugging his arm.

By this time they had reached one of the larger cafés of the Montmartre boulevard. Rose objected to going in, but soon yielded her scruples to her lover's wishes.

"In Paris," said George, "we may do precisely as we please. It is nobody's business but our own."

Two heavily-bearded men were playing dominoes at a table near the one they occupied. George ordered some mixed drinks after the American fashion. Rose glanced around her at the various groups sitting at the other tables. Her attention was riveted by a couple of artificial-looking women near by who were drinking beer and smoking cigarettes with some young men. Rose watched the rings of smoke as they rose from the saucy lips, and especially admired the

motions of the small gloved hands. She thought that they talked too loud, laughed too much, and were too familiar with the men. One of them, who had her hair dressed in a most elaborate manner, especially piqued Rose's curiosity. She heard her called Clorinde, and she was amusing herself telling the fortunes of her companions with a pack of cards.

"It's funny," whispered Rose to her companion after a while, "how that girl with the hair reminds me of Margaret Fornel, an old school-mate of mine. She has the same eyes and the same voice. I would swear it was she if I didn't know that Margaret is an attorney's wife at Pensol."

"My dear Rose," said George banteringly, "you must wake up and not look so sober. Give us one of your pretty smiles. Ah, that's better. You were looking as if you had lost your best friend."

"That's because I've never been used to anything," laughed Rose. "I suppose I *am* awkward. Those ladies would laugh at me, I dare say."

"Oh, no."

"I shall learn Parisian ways in time. But God preserve me from being anything like those women."

At this moment one of the domino-players let fall some words which arrested the attention of the lovers.

"Poor Berk," he was saying, "he's well paid for his own peccadilloes. 'Whoso draws the sword shall perish by the sword,' eh?"

"Oh, yes. You mean his wife's escapade," returned the other.

"And he a member of the Chamber of Deputies, too. It's perfectly shameful."

"Well, was it his fault that his wife ran away from him?"

"Yes, of course it was his fault—a rounder like him who slept out three nights out of four, and who was perpetually running after actresses. Here, boy, give me a bock."

"They are talking about Berk de Villemont," whispered Rose, excitedly.

"Yes. Keep quiet and listen. Don't let them suspect we are interested."

"The minister, his uncle," continued the last speaker, "ought to take a hand in."

"Bosh! the minister has other fish to fry."

"Who is the man? An actor, they say."

"Yes; the fellow who made a hit recently at the production of 'The Bluebird' at the Odéon."

"Is she pretty?"

"Oh, so, so. A blonde. She's too fat. All the women are too fat nowadays. The two lit out the next day after the production."

"Gad! Berk must be furious."

"Not he. He took it as a good joke, rather. I dare say he was glad to get rid of her. That

same night he supped with Prince René and a jolly lot."

"A good fellow, that German prince, they all say."

"Yes, and a gay one. A regular rake."

"Oh, a man is no less a man because he is a prince."

"Just so. And this being so, I think I'll end this game right here. There you are—blocked with fives."

"Thunder! What luck!"

"Well, look happy about it—as happy, say, as Berk de Villemont."

And the two men laughingly began another game. George paid his bill, and tucking Rose's hand under his arm, sought the street. Here he indulged himself in a long laugh.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I never would have believed it."

"Poor Monsieur de Villemont!" murmured Rose.

"My dear, it seems to be in the air. You and I and he. Ha, ha, ha!"

"His wife was very nice?"

"Yes. That accounts for it."

"Oh, but an actor! Think of it! Poor woman, how I pity her!"

"And yourself, by the same token?"

"Oh, no, George, never."

The lovers spent most of the ensuing week in the shops, where George urged his mistress to indulge her taste for dress to the utmost. But Rose would often demur.

"No," she would say, "I will not buy that. It is too expensive."

"But you are not buying it for yourself," George would urge. "It is for me you make yourself beautiful, is it not?"

And Rose would yield and would bestow upon her lover a ravishing smile, filled with a certain mysterious languor indefinable except to the happy fellow himself. But George would ruin himself for one of those smiles.

Their evenings they generally spent at one of the theatres, where Rose's magnificent beauty attracted a great deal of attention from the orchestra chairs. In the course of a few weeks they rented an apartment in a fashionable street, but in an unpretentious-looking house, the quiet exterior of which was belied by the luxury displayed within.

"Our interior," said Rose, as she proudly surveyed her drawing-room crowded with the most expensive furniture, bronzes, pictures, and bric-a-brac, "will have to excuse the plainness of our house-front."

The apartment was beautifully furnished throughout. But Madame de Magnac's bedroom in particular was a marvel of luxury and elegance.

In the midst stood a heavy carved oak bedstead, its four inlaid columns supporting a rich silken canopy. The walls were hung with some fine old tapestry representing peacocks and birds of paradise in all their brilliant coloring, trees embroidered in green and gold, cavaliers on white horses, and a background of gray ruins which formed an excellent foil and brought out the tone and finish of the web. The mantel, richly inlaid like the columns of the bed, was hung with blue plush velvet of the same shade as the upholstering of the chairs. On this stood a Psyche and a Diana-huntress facing each other, exquisitely carved in Carrera marble. There were also, on an ebony plinth, a German china clock and two Sèvres vases. The carpet was of the thickest velvet; and, as if to cap the climax of all this luxury, the ceiling was frescoed with a masterpiece of the Hungarian artist Hans Makart. A couple of graceful statuettes seemed to admire themselves in the great mirrors that reached from floor to ceiling at either end of the room. Portieres woven of silk and wool concealed the door that led into the bathroom. The bathtub, built in the shape of a gondola, was fashioned to resemble a swan. It and the floor upon which it stood were made of Limoge porcelain.

Into this retreat Rose withdrew each morning, and there forgot those long-ago summers when she, a half-savage country girl, used to delight to

plunge into the waters of the little river that flowed by Jarry's Cross.

A young dressmaker of Saint Cyprian to whom Rose had once done a kindness wrote to her from time to time and gave her the news of the town. By this means she knew that her daughter was living at Jarry's Cross; that Prosper was plodding steadily along at his work; and that George's wife was living at the Bastides. More than this she did not care to learn. The women down there might criticise her conduct. Their scandal and envy mattered not to her. She would never again see the wretched town. And Andrée? Well, she would get her again, some day when she was older. If her husband opposed her in this, she would take the child by force. But she did not believe the notary would dare to refuse her.

Meanwhile she gave herself entirely up to the pursuit of pleasure. She made George renew his acquaintance with old college friends. She coaxed him to take her to the Bois almost every day, no matter how cold the weather. She wanted to see and experience everything. It was, she said, the only way to smooth the country wrinkles out of her, and to get rid of her southern accent, about which she was a little diffident. She affected a certain thickness of tongue which caused her to be often taken for a foreigner. This pleased her. She much preferred to be thought

a Russian, German, or English lady than what she really was—a French peasant.

One evening George and Rose went to the Palais-Royal Theatre to see a new play which was attracting considerable attention. As they were passing through the *foyer* to their places George felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Villemont !” he exclaimed.

“No other.”

Rose turned and saw the Count de Villemont, the member of the assembly for Saint Cyprian. In some confusion she cast down her eyes, blushing furiously as the Count bowed to her, saying,

“I cannot be mistaken. It is Madame Parent?”

Rose stammered a few words and withdrew her hand from George’s arm. Villemont, not understanding the situation, continued,

“And my dear friend the notary? He has come to Paris at last, eh?”

“Yes, sir. He is not quite well this evening. He is at the hotel.”

“And your wife, Loudois? When is the little heir expected?”

“Oh, in a few months—in May or June.”

“Accept my felicitations in advance.”

They talked for a few moments longer. Then Rose, who had recovered her self-possession, took George’s arm, scarcely concealing her desire to get away.

"Now that you are in Paris," said the Count, cordially, "I hope you will come to dine with me. Of course with Monsieur Parent. It will be at a restaurant, you understand. I am living at my uncle's house. It is not very gay there. Name the date. Well, do you hesitate? You know, George, I was always glad to dine with you at Saint Cyprian."

George buttonholed the member and led him aside.

"Villemont," said he, "you can keep a secret?"

"Yes."

"Your word of honor?"

"Damn it! of course. Go on."

"Very well, then. We two have eloped and are living in Paris together as husband and wife."

Berk de Villemont felt himself blushing. It was his wife's story over again.

"Very well," he said presently. "Your secret is safe with me. After all, we have only one life to live. We might as well amuse ourselves. Shake."

"Villemont," said George, giving him his hand, "you are a true friend."

"And now," said the Count, turning back to Rose, who was standing pale and troubled a few steps from them, "I want you to dine with me Thursday evening. There will be some clever people, Madame—"

"Madame Rose de Magnac."

“Ah, very good name that. Well, don't forget. I shall count upon you. Until then.” And saluting profoundly, he left them to enter the theatre.

Rose was preoccupied during the entire evening. When they got home, George spoke to her about it.

“I was thinking,” she said. Then suddenly she wound her arms around her lover's neck and kissed him passionately upon the mouth. “My love is too strong for me, George. To-night I felt ashamed as I stood in the presence of that man. Then I gave myself a talking to. I said: ‘Rose, my girl, you are behaving wickedly; you must leave your lover at once and go straight back to your husband and child. Pray God for strength.’ Well, I didn't listen to a fool word they said on the stage. I prayed to-night in that theatre, fervently, sincerely, although I wasn't on my knees, just as I used to pray in church, just as I have prayed in my own chamber for a long winter's day. Pshaw! I might as well talk to the wind. It's too strong for me, I tell you.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Count had not been so much astonished by Loudois' confession as he had pretended to be. He had been by no means ignorant of the scandals that had been whispered about these two at Saint Cyprian. He was very glad of this opportunity to renew his acquaintance with the seductive Madame Parent. He had indeed at one time meditated a siege of the fair provincial's heart, but the advent of George Loudois had spoiled his plans. The younger man had for the time being carried all before him. But here in Paris the situation was changed. De Villemont would be the tender lover—the seducer, while George would occupy something of the position of the deceived husband. Rose's smile had lost none of its strange beckoning charm, and her deep, dark eyes still contained delicious, unutterable promises. So the deputy was disposed to hug himself over this chance meeting. He promised himself an early call upon the object of his new aspirations.

De Villemont was the husband of a cabinet minister's niece, of whom he had become embarrassed in the manner related. The separation

had in fact taken place with the utmost good feeling on both sides. The minister was ignorant of the rupture between his niece and her husband. As for her escapade with the actor, he was too much occupied with the cares of government to have time for newspaper gossip. He supposed that Madame de Villemont was at some health resort for the entire winter. Berk did not care to undeceive his uncle, and indeed was not himself at all certain that his wife, who was reputed to be a dragon of virtue, had so trodden her wifely duties under foot as was popularly believed. He did not indeed know where his wife was at the time, and he took precious good care not to find out. He admitted to himself, laughingly, that his own life was a sufficient excuse for his wife's conduct. Ever since his election it had been one continued orgy. He rarely made his appearance at the Chamber, but spent his nights in gambling or at the public balls, dragging his noble title and his political reputation through pretty much all the moral filth the wicked capital contained. He was a favorite at court, however. He was the leading spirit in all the Tuileries balls and of the little secret banquets at Compiègne, and he was understood to be the facile inventor and conductor of those unmentionable sports and pastimes in which Napoleon III. and his intimates were popularly supposed to revel.

His complexion was of that marble pallor which

Rose had taken so much pains and spent so much time in acquiring for herself. His figure was slender and his limbs delicately fashioned. His blond curly hair framed an aristocratic face and brought into strong relief the whiteness of his skin. A slight mustache shaded his upper lip, and he had a pair of eyes that could be very eloquent when the Count was engaged in his favorite pastime of lady-killing.

The Emperor had been particularly well satisfied on learning that he should be able to command De Villemont's vote and influence in the Chamber. His father had been an ambassador under Charles X. His nobility was as old as that of the kings who had now ceased to rule. It imposed upon and overawed the throng of pinch-beck nobles and sycophants who flattered and cringed before the new-crowned dynasty. Had he desired he might have married a daughter of one of the oldest and greatest families in the Empire. He had preferred the niece of a plebeian who had become by virtue of his talents and address one of the most conspicuous figures in the politics of the Second Empire.

The minister had at once determined to bring his new nephew into the Chamber of Deputies, and on looking over the map of France for a district for him, had selected that of Saint Cyprian as being the one where public education had reached its nadir-point, and where therefore the

voters might be considered least jealous of their political privileges and most complaisant to the imposition of a government candidate. That he chose wisely the event proved. For the Count had had no difficulty in securing his election after a somewhat liberal disbursement of patronage, crosses of the Legion, medals, and other gewgaws. By continuing to distribute these in a more prudent manner, and by an extravagant outlay in the way of promises, he had built up his influence in his district until, at the time of which I write, no man in the Chamber was more popular with his constituents than was this young voluptuary and boulevard loungeur. His uncle complimented him upon his political acumen.

"Oh," said Berk, "you are too flattering. It seems to me the game is very simple. It needs but two cards—blarney and the swill-tub. The wonder to my mind is that my colleagues are for the most part such asses as not to catch on."

The next day after the meeting at the Palais-Royal, Berk called at the apartment of Madame de Magnac. Rose's maid answered his ring.

"Is Madame de Magnac in?"

"Yes, sir. Will you give me your card?"

"La-la," said Berk to himself, "my lady is putting on style."

The maid took his card, and presently returning, said,

"Will you follow me, sir?"

The member was astonished at the luxury that presented itself on every side. He was ushered into a drawing-room richly furnished in blue and gold. The ceiling was frescoed to represent a cloudy sky peopled with angels and cherubs. A spark-screen of heavy silver stood before the fireplace. Fragrant flowers occupied vases in every corner of the room. In the midst of the soft warm light sat Rose in an elegant negligée. She was reclining upon a sofa, swinging a magnificent feather fan in her hand and wearing a contented simper upon her lips.

Berk bowed profoundly and excused himself for calling so early in the morning. Madame de Magnac gracefully waved him to a seat near her, and said to the maid,

"Phrosine, tell Monsieur de Magnac that a friend has called."

They had exchanged but a few words when Loudois entered.

"Ah, you were at work?" exclaimed the Count.
"I have disturbed you?"

"Not at all. I was amusing myself with my books. I have a fad for anthropology just now."

"The dickens you have!"

"Oh, George is becoming quite serious of late," interposed the lady.

"I congratulate you, my dear fellow. And

you, madame, permit me to compliment you on your elegant drawing-room."

"You are too kind."

"By the way, I've a bit of news for you from Saint Cyprian."

"What is it?" exclaimed Rose, eagerly, thinking of her child.

"Oh, nothing special. I have a letter from his majesty Leopold—our friend the Pouter."

"From Monsieur Moulineau?"

"He is coming to Paris to spend the Christmas holidays. He is full of his usual nonsense. He talks a good deal about George, and wants to know if I have seen him."

"Oh, we must move at once, then," cried Rose.

"You aren't afraid that I'll give you away, are you?" grunted the Count.

"No; but Moulineau is a boor whom I don't wish to see, that's all."

"Oh, don't worry," said Berk, laughing, "I'll be as mum as an oyster."

Loudois was leaning against the mantel, a trifle pensive.

"I know Pouter," he said. "He will break his back to find out where we are. If he doesn't succeed, he'll make up a pack of lies about us. Perhaps it would be better to receive him, if only to keep him quiet."

"Well, perhaps you are right," assented Rose,

doubtfully. "We must stop his mouth if we can. Have you answered his letter?"

"I'm going to, this evening."

"Then please don't say anything about us. We will let him know when he comes to the city."

"Rely upon my discretion, madame."

Rose had already acquired some of the arts of polite conversation. They talked literature, art, and even politics. The member, who was one of the leaders of the Imperial party, spoke with enthusiasm in favor of the new régime, which, while it maintained with firmness its own authority, had wisely abandoned many of the cruel usages and oppressive customs of former times.

George listened in silence to his friend, who really talked quite brilliantly. Presently Rose said, with an air of charming naïveté,

"I beg that you will send us tickets for the gallery when you make your next speech, sir."

"Most certainly."

Soon after he took his leave and drove at once to the Bourse. It was a time when all Paris was plunged in speculation. Stock-gambling, like a black cloud, hung over the city, darkening every brain and bringing night into many a generous heart. It was a time when fortunes were realized in a few days, while other fortunes were dissipated in as many hours. It was the last year of the Second Empire. The craze for luxury which had inspired all classes had heated the spirit of specu-

lation to the boiling-point. The whole world gambled. The Bourse was the field of battle, or rather the slaughter-house, in which murder was the order of the day.

To-day was a field-day at the Bourse. Up and down the steps ran nimble clerks and messengers charged with orders to buy and sell from customers who tremblingly waited in neighboring cafés. On the street in front was gathered a throng of private carriages awaiting their masters, who were gambling inside. Amid this throng stood more than one little coupé upholstered in blue satin, from the doors of which would peep from time to time pretty heads charmingly coifed, like so many little birds in their nests clamoring to be fed. Dapper stock-brokers would emerge from the Bourse and converse with the occupants of these carriages. After reassuring their fair customers with promises of a rising market that should practically have no end and that meant unlimited wealth and luxury for the pretty gamblers, they would disappear within the building again with the air of men who, as the high-priests of *agio*, held the fortunes of the world at their mercy—a spectacle for gods and men. Two women leaning lazily back in one of these coupés were talking.

“Why doesn’t Berk come?” exclaimed one, peevishly.

“He’ll be here directly.”

"Hum! I'm worried about him. Last night he had altogether too much to say about that little woman from the country, Madame—"

"De Magnac? Bah! You aren't afraid of a country woman, are you?"

"No. But—"

"Hush! here he is."

At this moment Berk appeared at the window and pressed the two little hands that were stretched out to him.

"Count, why did you make us wait?"

"My dear Leah—"

"Some new flame, I suppose."

"My dear child," said the member, shrugging his shoulders, "you know that you are my only real passion."

"Truly?"

"I am going to prove it."

"How prove it?" interposed the other girl.

"One of these days, if you two are good, you and Alice, I am going to introduce you to two friends of mine."

"Monsieur and Madame de Magnac?"

"Perhaps."

"Is she pretty?"

"You will see."

"When shall we see them?"

"I'll let you know."

"All right. Are they noble?"

"Hardly yet."

“ Millionaires ?”

“ That’s nearer it.”

“ Good—that’s very good.”

“ Now, my dear children, you must let me go. I will attend to that stock for you, Leah. How many shares did you want? Two hundred? Very good.”

De Villemont turned and slowly ascended the steps, while the coupé moved off.

Since the departure of his wife Prosper had become a changed man. The giant was bowed to the earth. He generally spent his evenings with his little girl, cutting bits of cork which he blackened in the flame of the lamp, making little images out of bits of bread, cutting paper-dolls, drawing pictures of tumblers, bottles, or whatever other objects would please the child. She greeted the results of his efforts with shouts of laughter which caused him to persevere with an energy that was ghastly to look upon. Sometimes he would play the game of “little mamma” with her.

“ You are my papa and mamma both now, aren’t you?” Andrée would ask.

“ Yes, yes,” he would respond slowly and awkwardly, as if the words froze his lips and his heart. “ I must take your mother’s place as best I can,” he would think, soul-sick in his loneliness.

So, when the little child would order, the big

child would laugh, make faces, sing even, although when he approached the great pier-glass in the drawing-room, and saw his eyes so horribly wide open and his mouth so distorted, he would tremble lest his reason was about to forsake him altogether.

When the mother abandons the house, it is as if night had eclipsed day. Everything is dark and gloomy after that. Dead or fled, mementoes of her are everywhere. Here a bit of her writing, there a piece of her fancy work, some of her colored worsted, an old ring or brooch, a pair of gloves, a veil, or the chair upholstered in blue silk, her work. She it was who ordered the setting of the table, brushed the little girl's hair, presided over all the pleasures that the family enjoyed. When she was sick, she used to sit there in that big arm-chair after supper was over. If she slept, everybody tiptoed about, for fear of waking her. She was so sweet, so beautiful in her madonna-slumber.

When father and daughter had exhausted the evening with their games, when the table was covered to overflowing with the sketches, the little dough manikins, and the paper dolls, the tired child would quietly fall asleep in the man's arms, and he would patiently wait until old Margaret came to take her.

When he was alone he would get up and pace the room wildly. He saw his happiness gone

forever, and contemplated with anguish the dreary desert of his future. He said that this contemplation of his abandoned home was a punishment that he did not deserve. Would not some one make a noise or do something, so that he could forget for a moment this memory which followed him about so pitilessly? Perhaps God would have pity on him and take away his reason. At such times, when the strong man was crushed to the earth under the weight of his agony, he seemed to hear a strange voice calling through the dreary silence :

“Monsieur Parent and you, little girl, you may make all the noise you want to. Mamma has gone away; the home is destroyed.”

The bills for the house-furnishing began to shower upon the notary, who found himself unable to pay them. His creditors, having sympathy for him in his bereavement, offered to give him time and to take his personal notes. Clapier counselled the giving up of the furniture and a refusal to pay for the same.

“It is ruin if you don’t,” he urged.

“I would rather a hundred times be ruined than dishonored,” responded the notary, calmly.

He was advised to quit Saint Cyprian and buy a business in another city. But this was impossible. The office was on the brink of ruin. He must try and gain time, so as to weather the storm that was sweeping down upon him.

The Beriases remained quietly at Jarry's Cross, seeing no one. They also were nearly ruined. They had been obliged to sell all the lands they owned in the neighborhood of Rouclée, and their valuable vineyards at Prince's Spring had gone into the hands of the Marquis de Jamaye. All they had left were the two farms on the left-hand side of the high-road, and these were heavily mortgaged. Scarcely any one now offered to shake the old farmer's hand of a Sunday at church.

Little Andrée often came to Jarry's Cross. But Prosper never left his office. Janette received news of her daughter regularly through Lucette, the Saint Cyprian dressmaker. But she was unable to get from that trusty person Rose's address in Paris.

"I suppose you will give me the address when my daughter is dying," the old woman would grumble.

"Don't be angry, Madame Berias. I am devoted to the interests of Madame Parent, that is all. She didn't do right to leave her husband, I admit. But that's not my business. If you have any message for her I will forward it conscientiously. But I won't give you the address. I have promised."

The poor old woman could not insist. Her husband and son-in-law did not know that she was constantly in receipt of news from the runaway. She kept her own counsel, and wept quietly into

the mangers as she fed the cattle of an evening. When Lucette came to read a letter to her she would draw her into some far corner of the barn, and there, among the cattle with their smoking muzzles and their great vacant eyes turned wonderingly toward them, she would make the dress-maker repeat word for word the lines traced by her lost Rose. The latter wrote that she was living quietly and happily with George Loudois, and that if her mother needed anything she had only to tell her what it was.

“Money made in that way!” the old woman would exclaim. “Never!”

And with that sluggish calm that she had acquired from long dwelling among farm animals, she would hear the letter through, happy to learn that her daughter was not sick, and saying at the end that there was still no reason for giving up hope of Rose’s final repentance and salvation.

On these days Francis found his wife more than usually cheerful, which he did not understand. However, he had troubles enough to occupy his mind and keep it from curiosity. The month of December that year was a terrible one for farmers. The fields, almost submerged by the incessant rains, had to be manured over again.

“Never mind, father,” Janette would say. “There’s no use kicking against the pricks. That won’t mend matters. Let us hope still. Perhaps

little Andrée will see her mother again some day—”

“If she ever comes back again, I’ll break her head with my mattock.”

“Hush! hush! God says to forgive—”

“God? Well, just let God mind his own business, that’s all. Besides, there’s a lot of scandal about our son-in-law. They say he has embezzled.”

“How can you believe such a thing of Prosper?” exclaimed Janette, angrily. “Francis, you know that he is an honest man. Look at all of those bills of Rose’s that he paid out of his own pocket.”

“Yes; and if he hadn’t, we would have been called on again. And what would we pay with, I’d like to know. If he had watched his wife more carefully, it would not be so.”

“That’s as much our fault as his. You wanted to see our daughter nicely dressed on Sundays. Her head was turned. She thought she was richer than she really was. But”—sobbing—“we were so happy—so happy—oh! oh!”

“There, now—there, now, don’t cry,” exclaimed the old man, completely carried away himself, as he got up and kissed his wife’s cheek.

So passed each long evening at the old farmhouse. The two old people sat alone, with never a neighbor-gossip to drop in and cheer them with the news. Janette plied her distaff; Berias made

brooms and baskets to sell on the next market-day. If some belated traveller chanced to peep through the window, he could see these two aged beings, their faces wrinkled by a long life of toil, their hands calloused by the farming implements and smirched by the dust of the barns, passing the lone watches of the night laboring at their separate tasks like wax automatons, without hope or desire for the future.

During this period of mourning and sorrow in the Berias family, Rose, a little weary of her gay life, felt within her a faint re-stirring of her old religious enthusiasm. She began to go to mass at the Saint-Roch church hard by, where, without knowing it, she elbowed and was elbowed by actresses and women of the world turned devotees. She would sit there for hours plunged in sad memories, dreaming that she was again in the old home, intoxicated by the morning sunlight and the fresh verdure of the fields, listening to the singing of a thrush in the hedge, picking daisies, drinking milk fresh from the cow—in short, that she had returned again to the dear glad days of her childhood. It seemed to her as if, down there in the old home at least, the God of Pity was pardoning her fatal passion. Then her thought wandered to the time when she had knelt in fervent prayer before the great white Virgin in the oratory in her garden. She had at least come out victorious from that conflict. It had needed but

a glance from Prosper's eyes to chase away the temptation then. And now all was over—all lost!

Well, she had made her bed and she must lie in it. The sweet voices that used once to sing in her heart were silenced forever. There was no use in hoping. Instead of complaining of hard fate, it was her business to laugh at it. Curses were fitter for her lips than prayers.

She was not to blame, anyway. Did she know what she was about when she took the fatal step? She had been driven by some invisible force—had she not? Then she remembered what the old people had said in her childhood when she had thrown the melted tin into the face of the poor sleeping dog. Yes, she was a natural when she was a child. But now—the lady of to-day—she who had driven a good man to despair and deliberately abandoned her child—ah, that one, that “Big-Purse” who was even now revelling in an unhallowed love, she was unworthy of forgiveness—she was eternally damned.

Then why pray?

Her poor muddled brain and conscience were unable to see the truth—the light of salvation. Again she plunged into her life of excitement, a sneer for the foolish fears that had terrified her curling the red of her lip.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROSE began to find life very dull. She was tired of theatres, of balls, of driving to the Bois. Nothing amused her. So, to relieve the monotony of her existence, De Villemont projected a little supper at a private hotel on the Boulevard Saint Germain. The guests were to be, besides herself and George, two young friends of the Count's, actresses at the Bouffes-Parisiennes, and, last but not least, the redoubtable Moulineau, who was in town for the Christmas holidays. Midnight was the hour named for the banquet, to which the young actresses came direct from the theatre just as they were, in their theatrical costumes.

Alice, the younger, was a very pretty girl, with a Grecian nose, pink nostrils, a mouth like a rose, and peachy cheeks which Nature had left nothing in the way of freshness and color to desire. She was dressed in a page's costume, with a satin doublet, velvet mantle and trunks, and silk tights all of a delicate blue. Her heavy black hair, rich and purple, like bunches of Prince Rupert grapes, hung down her back to her waist.

"As pretty as the devil," murmured De Villemont as he surveyed her, not minding the jealous glances of his mistress, Leah, who was clad in a long crimson velvet robe, with a particularly rakish-looking Tryolean hat surmounting her too-golden and too curly locks.

Rose gazed upon the actresses with interest, and, becoming quickly acquainted with them, listened, marvelling, to their stories of stage life and to the scandals of the coulisses which they had at their tongues' end. Becoming gradually warmed up by the tone of their conversation, she permitted herself to toss off a glass of the iced champagne. This made her head spin and unloosened her own tongue. She laughed and joked, and made no demur when Leah proposed to dress her hair in a more stylish manner.

Moulineau was in high feather, partly at meeting Loudois and Rose and partly at the excellence of the cooking and the abundance of the wine. The *glou-glou* of the bottle as the champagne foamed out of it into the Pouter's glass was not more unctuous than were that worthy's laugh and the smack of his lips after he had emptied his goblet. Presently the wine began to heat his blood. Drops of perspiration stood upon his brow. With these the poetry and melody of the band-master's nature began to exude also. He permitted himself to warble a verse of an old drinking-song :

“ When the wine goes to my head
And my brain begins to swim,
I see pearls and rubies red
Sailing round the beaker’s brim.”

Bumper followed bumper in rapid succession. Before emptying each glass Moulineau would apostrophize its contents as follows :

“ O wine, enter into the stomach of your redeemer ; don’t do him any more harm than he wishes you ; and above all squeeze yourself closely together, for there’s a lot more coming.”

Each repetition of this speech was greeted with peals of laughter from the three young women. From time to time the band-master would go and survey himself in the glass and pronounce the apostrophe so well remembered in Saint Cyprian :

“ O Nature, two inches more and thy handiwork would be perfect !”

“ Well, dear,” said George to Rose, when the festivities were at their height, “ you don’t regret the stale old life at Saint Cyprian ?”

“ I should say not. What a lovely evening !”

“ We’ll have many of them.”

De Villemont, seated between Leah and Alice, rallied Moulineau. Finally the latter got up from his chair, a drunken leer in his eye and a drunken look in his neck-tie, which had slipped round under one ear. Addressing Rose, he said,

“ More fun here than at Saint Cyprian, eh, Mad—hic—Madame Parent ?”

“What does he say?” asked Alice.

“Oh, don’t mind him,” whispered Rose; “he is tight.”

“Ma’mè Parent,” continued the Pouter, “you ’member your Christmas-party last year. Funny people, all those, eh? There was your papa Berias an’ mamma Janette and—”

“Shut up!” exclaimed George, reddening.

“Don’t you want me t’ go on, Georgie? Then you oughtn’t to have invited me—see? When I’m drunk I must talk. Then there was old Faure, an’ Judge Cornet who sang the Christmas carol, and your mamma and papa, George, and my lady’s husband, poor Proshper.”

“Ladies, don’t believe a word the brute says,” cried George, raging. “He’s mad. He needs a strait-jacket.”

“In Heaven’s name!” whispered Rose, pulling the drunken man’s sleeve.

“Shut up, Rose,” roared Pouter, “or I’ll give ’em the whole story. I haven’t any secrets, me, among friends—see? Then ’er’ was a lill Chris’mas baby. You wan’ed to send ’er to bed; she wouldn’t go day-day. Tha’ was Andrée, eh? Ma’mè Pa—Parent’s lill girl. Oh, a cherub who stared at the moon.”

And Moulineau warbled sonorously,

“Have you seen the moon,

My kid?

Have you seen the moon?”

Alice and Leah began to stare. Rose felt herself sinking through the floor with mortification. The band-master, emboldened by the consternation he had produced continued his gabbling, stopping from time to time to chant lugubriously,

“Have you seen the moon,

My kid?

Have you seen the moon?”

“Ladies, I have an idea!” exclaimed De Villemont, thinking to create a diversion, at the same time shaking his head at Moulineau.

“*You* got an idea?” mumbled the latter, drunkenly. “Well, go set on it. P’raps it’ll hatch.”

“Shut up, you wind-bag,” hissed the Count in Pouter’s ear, “or I’ll let daylight through you!”

The band-master, somewhat sobered by De Villemont’s manner, fell into his seat and relapsed into silence. The latter continued:

“If George won’t mind, Madame Rose, suppose you change costumes with Alice. You can do it in the ladies’ dressing-room. It’ll be good practice for the approaching masked ball at Saint Mole’s.”

Rose looked at George.

“If you wish to,” he said; and thought, “She’ll look pretty enough to eat.”

The three young women went out laughing and presently returned with Rose transformed into a pretty, a very pretty, page. She walked boldly up to the pier-glass, but the moment she caught

sight of herself in it she uttered a cry and placed her hands over her face. Then she ran to the corner where the ladies' wraps were piled on a chair, and pulling her cloak from under the heap, covered her legs with it. The others greeted her efforts at concealment with shrieks of laughter. The Pouter advanced, wiping his lips elaborately.

"Dam'me," he said, "you are very pretty, Ma'me Parent. You must kiss your little papa."

He advanced his cheek to receive the salute, but Rose, enraged at his impudence and at his imprudent conduct, struck it a sharp blow with the palm of her hand and rushed from the room. The two actresses followed her into the ladies' dressing-room, whence could be heard smothered shrieks of laughter as the young women exchanged garments again.

Moulineau's principal purpose in coming to Paris had been to find Rose and to declare his passion for her. The old beau had been somewhat put out on hearing the news of Rose's elopement. That Madame Parent, after having rejected his addresses, could have given herself to another—it was amazing. But he complacently thought that a woman never stops at one lover. That night of the supper, which had been little less than an orgy, assured him that the so-called Madame de Magnac was disposed to be rapid. All that was needed was a little management on his part. He was sure to arrive.

Accordingly the next day he called upon Rose to talk over, as he said, Saint Cyprian affairs. The women down there were gossiping so scandalously about the runaways. He had defended her with all his might and main, for his part.

George had gone out with De Villemont, and Rose, who thought it best to be politic, received the band-master graciously, alone. Moulineau's first performance was to press his lips warmly upon Rose's hand as she sat leaning back in her easy chair.

"Please don't," the young woman exclaimed. Whereupon the Pouter let go. Rose edged away from him.

"Jolly evening last night, eh?" was Moulineau's first remark. "Pretty women too, eh? Are you fond of actresses?"

And again he seized her hand, which she once more pulled away from him with some difficulty.

"How beautiful you are!"

"Monsieur Moulineau!" exclaimed Rose, laughing.

"Oh, there is no Monsieur Moulineau," he exclaimed. "There is only a man who loves you—adores you."

"I beg of you, stop," said Rose, getting up. "I am not used to such conduct. Oh, I was wrong. You are only joking, as you did at Saint Cyprian. But it is naughty of you to scare me so."

"Oh, I love you!"

"What, again?"

"Yes, again and always."

"Sir, I beseech you—"

"O Rose!"

"If you don't stop, I'll scream," said Rose, getting angry.

"Oh, come, pretty one, no nonsense. That was all right when you were Madame Parent. But now—"

"Well, and now?"

"You are mine."

"Yours? I?"

"Yes, I tell you. Why not? Ain't I a man—as good as another? As good as your Loudois? Listen. It is for your sake—for yours alone—that I have come to Paris. One kiss, Rose?"

"I loathe you."

"You loathe me—me, son of Lucien Moulineau! Loathed by Berias's daughter—the 'Big-Purse'?"

"You are insolent. Go."

"No, I won't go. You can ring if you choose. I'll speak before your servants. A wretch who leaves her child like a lost parcel; a hussy who will die some day like a dog on a dung-heap."

"You are a coward and an idiot. You disgust me."

"Oh, I disgust you? You loathe me? It won't be long before I find you dying of hunger on the public streets. Get out, you hussy!"

Moulineau was sweating with rage. Rose stood looking at him fixedly.

"Yes," she said coldly, "I will give myself to the first comer if I have to. But never to you."

"We shall see, you she-devil."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you. You may say what you please down there at Saint Cyprian—that I am a woman of the town, a nymph of the pave—what you will; but you will not be able to boast of me yourself, Monsieur Moulineau."

"That is your last word?"

"It is."

"Then look out. You'll hear something drop."

"I despise you."

"Ah-ha! you turn up your nose at me? You play the prude with me? Very well. Look out for me."

He departed, raging. Some days afterwards one of the most widely read papers in the city contained an account of the scandalous goings-on of Madame de Magnac. Loudois was in despair.

"Who was the coward who wrote it?" he exclaimed.

"That coward—yes, coward is the word—Pouter."

"Moulineau?"

"Yes."

"The scoundrel!"

A few weeks after Rose met her libeller on the street. She had sent away her carriage and was

going into a shop to make some purchases. She was alone when she saw the Pouter lounging along, admiring himself in the shop-windows. The blood flew to her head, and her eyes watered with rage. The old wild instincts which had been softened by education awoke in her. She stripped off her gloves and dashed at Moulineau, sinking her fingers in his beard, his hair, his cheeks. He, blinded by the terrible scratching she gave him, bellowed like a calf.

“Oh, if you were not a woman!”

“Yes,” she panted fiercely, “I am a woman whom you have insulted. I acted like a meek and humble creature when you threatened me with my husband’s anger. Now I have a lover. I will have ten if I choose. But you? Never, never! Do you hear me?”

And she sprung upon him as she had been wont to spring upon her playmates in her childhood days. Moulineau’s cheeks were terribly lacerated. Rose’s little fingers were like claws. He, unable to get away from her, began to cry for help. A crowd gathered around them. Some men seized the Pouter. Whereupon Rose calmed down at once and completely.

“This man has insulted me,” she said quietly, “and I beat him. He is a scoundrel.”

So saying, she made her way proudly and coolly, through the open-mouthed throng, and had dis-

appeared from sight before Moulineau could collect his scattered senses and have her arrested.

A month from that day Rose was the mistress of Count Berk de Villemont. George Loudois had suddenly become disenchanted. The life he was leading disgusted him. He wrote a humble letter to his father, begging him to intercede in his behalf with Marie. He was, he said, filled with shame and contrition. He had been mad, but he had waked from his troubled dream. Would his wife have pity on him and take him back, after the deadly blow he had inflicted on her faith and affection?

The elder Madame Loudois repaired immediately to the Bastides and conferred with Marie's aunt. Madame Varennes was delighted at the news. The young wife was like to faint with joy when she learned that her still idolized husband was about to return to her, tender and repentant. It was arranged that the reunited couple should abandon Saint Cyprian forever and take up their residence in Nice.

"The sight of that poor lonely Monsieur Parent makes me heart-sick," said the young wife, eager to forget the past and escape from everything that might remind her of it.

De Villemont, in the mean while, devoted himself passionately to his new mistress. Rose, on

her part, was disposed to congratulate herself that she was now the property of a real man of the world—a true Parisian. She expected soon to be initiated into the dark secrets of political life. A new existence opened out before her. To prepare herself for her new rôle she gave up novel-reading and began to devote herself to the study of history and current politics. The member, on his side, gave up his other mistresses, his clubs, and even stock-gambling.

“Your nephew is going mad,” said some one to the cabinet minister.

“I don’t blame him,” returned the old politician, smiling grimly. “I’d like to be able to go mad that way, myself.”

Rose gradually became a person of importance. At Saint Cyprian her relations with the member for the district became known, and Moulineau’s gossip had revealed her address. Letters began to pour in upon her from the constituency. To-day some one wanted a tobacco-license; to-morrow a civil servant clamored for promotion; day after to-morrow some petty placeman desired to have his perquisites increased. Her mails were full of demands for charitable and church donations. As Madame de Magnac wished to return favorable replies to all her petitioners, the poor Count was kept running from one executive department to another.

"It seems to me you are the member instead of me," he said to Rose one day, laughingly.

Rose drove to the Chamber often with her lover. "The private entrance," the Countess (as she came to be called) would proclaim with the air of a *grande dame*. Whereupon the ushers would bow obsequiously, tittering in their sleeves. She urged De Villemont to devote himself to his political duties, and it was due to her entreaties that the Saint Cyprian member was now often on his legs in debate.

"Oh, if you knew how proud I am of you, Villemont!" she would exclaim, with glittering eyes.

"Perhaps you will make something of me yet, eh, Rose?"

"A minister—nothing less will satisfy me;" and she would give him one of her adorable kisses. "You must be a minister. But I am afraid for the cause. The Emperor has not sufficient grasp. The opposition is growing in strength day by day."

Her dream was to be received at the Tuileries. What, after all, could they say of her? Moulineau's malicious stories were by this time forgotten. She would appear at court as Berk's cousin, the widowed Countess de Magnac. Nobody would suspect what their real relations were. Finally, De Villemont, who could not withstand her entreaties, procured for her the desired honor, and

she had the extreme felicity of bowing before the Empress Eugénie at one of the last and most brilliant balls of the winter of 1870, the year of the cataclysm.

One day in Rose's mail-bag there appeared a letter directed in a crabbed handwriting which was not unknown to the Countess de Magnac.

"Ha!" she said, "it is from mamma."

The letter was as follows:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER: Mr. Victor Moulineau, who has just come back from the city, has given me your address. I am very glad, because I would rather tell you about ourselves in my own way than to have to go to that dressmaker Lucette, whom, by the way, you had better not trust too much.

"In the first place, they say George Loudois has made it up with his wife, and they have gone to live at Nice. We don't hear anything from you, and your father and I are much worried about you. We are longing to see you come back into the right path again. Have pity on us, and come back to your home. Now that the Loudois are gone, everything can be arranged.

"They say you have lovers in the city and that you are acting badly. You ought not to make us suffer from this disgrace any longer, for the Beriases have always been respectable, and so have my folks, the Grignons.

"Your husband is very unhappy. The village is gloomy. We are out with nearly everybody in the place, to say nothing of the fact that old Bridget, the cow, took cold the other day and is dying. I suffer more than I ever did before, my dear daughter. I would never have thought to see you do such a thing. You must have been tempted by some of those ladies with whom you went at Saint Cyprian. I hate very much to say these things to you, but I speak true.

"Come back—if not for our sakes, Rose, then for little Andrée's. You know she thinks you are dead. Come back, Rose. Your father and I will meet you at the station. You can live with us, and no one will be the wiser. I am getting old fast. What has happened during the past year has taken the courage out of me. You were cruel to do what you did.

"I pray God and the Virgin to make you see your duty. Your father and I and little Andrée kiss you amid our tears.

"Your mother, who loves you and who will love you always,

"JANETTE BERIAS, *née* GRIGNON."

"A letter from your mother?" asked Berk.

"What does the worthy woman say?"

"Nothing."

"How does she say nothing in so many words?"

"Oh, she wants me to come back home."

"And you?"

"I'm not going."

"Good."

"Yes. I'll stay with you. But on one condition—I must see my daughter next summer."

"You shall."

"How good you are, dear! Do you know a mother ought to have a good deal of sympathy."

She said this so sweetly and simply that the Count felt moved.

"Rose," he said, "you can always count upon me. I love you very dearly. Neither George nor even your husband appreciated you as I do. You are my idol. Oh, if death would but release me!"

"Hush, Berk, you must not think of that. It is not right. Listen. Life has always seemed to me like a game of chance. Look at me. I have plunged headlong into a life of pleasure and shame. Sometimes I have thought that it was useless to reflect upon one's actions, because everything was predestined. But then, again, I have other moods in which I fear some terrible punishment for my sins—when I have dreadful presentiments."

"I was wrong," said De Villemont, gravely, "to speak so of death. But I should love to introduce you to the world as my lawful wife. When I am near you, dear, I think no longer of the disgrace cast upon me by the woman who

bears my name. My contempt for her is dissipated in your presence. For your sake I forget and forgive."

Taking her small head in his hands as she stood beside him, he pressed a long kiss upon her lips. She shivered slightly and disengaged herself.

"No, Berk, no. Not that," she murmured. "My love must not be an obstacle to your career. You would have me love you with my whole heart, would you not? You would have me destroy all the memories of my life? I will. I will, gladly. I will know only you henceforward. But I must be proud of you. You have an illustrious name; you must not tarnish it. You must succeed. What is life but a struggle—a long fight for success? Oh, how I could love you if you once fought your way into the cabinet! How I could worship a powerful minister! George and Prosper were commonplace men, content to be lost in the vulgar herd. But thy place, Villemont, is in the front rank of battle. Courage, my hero, courage!"

She pressed his hands nervously in an access of enthusiasm, and continued:

"How beautiful they are, those visions, Glory and Power! To see men and women bend the neck before one—to have a hand that can scourge with sorrow or bring blessings and peace as one chooses. Oh, how I could worship a man who

could give these things to me! Work, work, my friend. I shall be at your side to sustain, to encourage. It is not sufficient that a woman love a man. She must be proud of him also. She must be able to share his hopes and his tears. That is why I left my home and its commonplace monotony. They were killing me. I wanted to live, not to vegetate. My existence was passing away smoothly and calmly. Nothing happened. I had nothing to fear and nothing to hope for. What was I? First the wife of a country notary, then the mistress of a plebeian whose money smelt of trade. Oh, I was foolish, mad, insensate! But with you, Villemont, how life has changed! I live in a different world—a world of power, of pride, of fame, of glory: You are my god. And you must make me feel that I am worthy to be the mistress of a god. O Villemont, I would see all these women—these women of our world—cringing, crawling before me, their hearts running over with envy at my happiness.”

And Rose, half hysterical from the sudden intensity of her desires, threw herself sobbing into her lover's arms. The Count looked down upon her suffused eyes and working features. A look of amusement glimmered in his eyes for a single instant. Then he stooped and kissed her.

CHAPTER XV.

MADAME DE MAGNAC received on Wednesday evenings. On these occasions her handsome apartment in the Rue Saint-Honoré was crowded with men known in the worlds of politics, of letters, and of art, all of whom were more or less intimate at court or belonged at least to the Imperial party. To be sure, the lady's affectations of manner and speech, her ignorance of polite society, and her inordinate luxury were the occasion for much quiet amusement on the part of her guests. But the nephew of the most powerful politician in France was the master of the establishment, and this sufficed. Berk's ornamental stories about his fair cousin's antecedents were received with complaisance, if not with full credence.

The member from Saint Cyprian did not care much about these entertainments himself. In fact they bored him. But he was so much in love with Rose that he could deny her nothing. Besides, the young woman never lost an opportunity of impressing upon him the duty of moving about in the world and making friends among the political element. This was as good a way to augment his popularity as any, perhaps. So he

lent himself to his mistress's plans with a sufficient degree of equanimity. One evening he entered her room with a mysterious air.

"What is it?" she demanded, looking into his eyes.

"I have a pleasant surprise for you."

"Oh, quick, tell me!"

"At your next reception I shall introduce you to a prince."

"A real one?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"His Royal Highness, Prince René, heir to the Archduchy of Hesse-Wolfenbuttel."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rose, her eyes shining, "are you sure he'll come?"

"I am to meet him that evening at my uncle's at dinner. He will accompany me here afterwards."

"Oh, how delightful!"

And the former peasant-girl spent the next few days in dreams of royal conquest.

On the following Wednesday evening, sure enough, the Count presented the German prince to his mistress. The latter was a tall man of middle age, with a large forehead, flaxen hair, and light blue eyes. He had lived in France for many years, and was more or less well known to the majority of the assembled guests. After the prince had paid his first compliments to the lady of the

house, a number of these gathered round the two and the conversation became general. Presently it took a political turn. The liberal tendencies which threatened the empire and the relations between France and Germany were discussed. The prince declared that such a thing as war between the two empires was impossible, and proceeded to pronounce a panegyric upon the French nation, its emperor, its institutions, and its morals which caused a delighted old senator to exclaim enthusiastically,

“Your highness, you are one of the best Frenchmen I know.”

Presently the conversation drifted round to the subject of the citizen's duty. At this point Rose addressed herself to the great man, lifting her downcast eyes to his in an adorably hesitating way.

“I want to ask you something, my lord,” she said.

The prince bowed gallantly.

“I wish your opinion upon a point my cousin and I were discussing the other day. I said—and don't you think I am right?—that it is the duty of man to be ambitious and to go out into the world and fight for power, while it is woman's province to remain in the sanctity of her home, encouraging her lord and master by her counsel and aiding him by her prayers. She should be his reward after victory—is it not true?”

“Perfectly, madame, perfectly,” exclaimed the

prince, captivated by the air of Oriental submission that pervaded her manner as well as her thought. "Every man should be ambitious, especially those who are blessed with birth, brains, and fortune. No man can stand still. A people that does not conquer—it is strange but true—is a people conquered. If a man does not grow taller he will surely grow shorter."

"Ah, my lord," said a famous old journalist who stood near, "if all princes were but like you!"

"Thank you for the implied compliment," said the great man, graciously. "But, my friend, I do not think there are any bad princes, at least not in Europe. For the rest of the world I cannot answer."

This little sally was greeted with its assured modicum of complaisant laughter, and then the conversation became general again.

The day after the reception Prince René called at two o'clock in the afternoon. Rose was alone in her drawing-room. The conversation of the evening before was resumed, and presently took a tender turn.

"In France," said the duke, "they don't know what love means. It is a flame too quickly lighted and as easily extinguished. It is like the lightning which 'doth cease to be ere one can say, It lightens.' Men love easily, but as easily forget. With us it is different. We do not give ourselves so easily, but we remember longer. And by the

bye, dear madame, as I am going to leave Paris soon, I have brought a little present that I hope will aid to keep me in your remembrance."

• He took from his pocket a handsome jewel-casket.

"This is the work of Samuel, the most famous jeweller in my realm," he said. "There is not another necklace like it in Europe, and yet it is scarcely worthy of you. You are so beautiful."

"My lord—I—"

"Madame, I love you. I loved you the first moment my dazzled eyes beheld your beautiful face. Could you not read in my eyes how it was with me? My peerless one, come to me."

He kneeled at her side, and her head sunk on his breast. The peasant-girl felt a new rapture. It seemed to her as if these caresses which were showered upon her face, her neck, her hair were the first kisses of her life, such was their strange charm.

"You will come to me in Germany," he was whispering in her ear. "You shall have a palace. We will be so happy."

"My lord—"

"Don't call me so. Call me 'René.'"

When De Villemont returned from the Chamber that afternoon he found his mistress plunged in rosy dreams. Cuddled up on a sofa, Rose scarce heard her lover's step as he entered. And

when he kissed her forehead and murmured a few tender words in her ear, she shut her eyes and tried to imagine that it was still the passionate and florid language of the prince to which she listened. As in a vision she saw herself at a royal court, the mistress *en titre* powerful and terrible, the envy of women, the adored of men. Already she beheld her own name writ down in the lists of love's queens alongside those of La Vallière, Pompadour, and Du Barry.

"Prince René was here just now," she sighed, rousing herself.

"Ah, indeed!"

"He wants you to go to the Bois with him."

"Yes, I told him I'd go."

"He is going away soon. See what a present he brought me."

"Superb!"

"A royal gift, isn't it?"

"Yes, he gave one like that to—"

"What?"

"Oh—er—nothing."

"Yes. You said, 'He gave one like that to—'"

"Oh—er—yes—to the Duchess de Lornani, the Emperor's cousin."

"You are lying."

"I?"

"Yes, you. Stop now. Berk, tell me true; to whom did the prince give a necklace like this?"

"Oh, what difference does it make to you?"

"Never mind ; I wish to know."

"Well, then—to little Clenery."

"The Duke de Lengués' mistress?"

"Precisely."

"Then," exclaimed Rose, reddening with anger, "all I have to say is that your prince is a person of no manners, and this is how I treat his present—the German blackguard!"

Tears of vexation suffused her eyes as she threw the necklace into the fireplace.

"Rose!"

"I suppose I can do what I please with what is my own."

"Of course. But if the prince knew!"

"You can tell the prince from me that he is a boor and, what is more, a Prussian spy."

"You are crazy. Prince René loves France."

"Do you think so? Well, you're a ninny, that's all."

With this she began to laugh frantically. Then she cried. After which she laughed and cried together.

"You will make yourself sick, my darling."

"Villemont," sobbed Rose, "you may tell his Royal Highness from me that I understand his game. He is a spy, I tell you. You are all fooled by him. Ah! he treats me like a dancer, like a Clenery, like a common prostitute. Oh, if I had known!"

"Well?"

"I would have spit in his face and told him to carry that to his master, Bismarck. I am only a woman, a peasant, but I can see further through a ladder than any of you. I tell you they are taking your measure. But you don't care, as long as you can lick a prince's boots."

"My dear little girl, don't excite yourself so. The prince did wrong. But I have got you a present that has no mate, I assure you."

And that evening when a magnificent parure of diamonds made its appearance peace was restored once more in the family. Rose amused herself by piling up the number of errands the member was to run for his constituents the next day.

"Do you know, Rose," he said at last, good-naturedly, "that I believe you have made my election sure?"

"Oh," said the young woman, laughing merrily, "I understand they mean to break my back down there when I come home again. But never mind. I love the furrow in which I was born. Berias's daughter is a good girl when all's said."

"My uncle told me the other day that he was very well pleased with me. I never stop begging. It seems that is the business of the true representative. By the way, have you answered your mother's letter yet?"

"No. I don't want any more nonsense from

her. Lucette keeps me informed. Andree is well and pretty. That's all I care to know."

"And your husband?"

"Always the same, poor man. Oh, let's talk of something else. Whenever I think of Saint Cyprian it gives me the blue-devils."

They talked for a long time that evening, and before going to bed Villemont had come to the conclusion that the prince really was a suspicious character, and that as for Rose, she was really a very shrewd little woman.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE of the persons whom Madame de Magnac had assisted with her political influence was a certain widow Belloir, a former resident of Saint Cyprian, who had been much reduced in circumstances since the death of her husband, and now lived with her bedridden sister in Paris. Rose had secured for this poor woman a license to set up a tobacco-stand, which was the same as assuring her a comfortable livelihood. In return for this favor she had gone to Saint Cyprian at the instance of her benefactress, and made an effort to secure the custody of Andrée, so as to bring her to Paris to her mother's arms. But the notary had threatened her with arrest if she did not go about her business. Enraged both at the ill-success of her mission and at Prosper's threats, she had taken some pains to inform herself about his affairs, and on returning to Paris had told a most dismal tale of his approaching ruin. But this, instead of pleasing Rose, as the widow had supposed it would, had awakened in her the liveliest sympathy. When the Count made his appearance that evening, Rose went to him at once, exclaiming,

"O my friend, I'm so glad you've come. I need your aid. I am a wretched, wretched woman. I must have a lot of money."

"Ho, ho! more diamonds? Well, I saw such a—"

"No—not that— My husband is a bankrupt, or will be if something is not done at once."

"Your husband? Poor fellow!"

"We mus'nt let the grass grow under our feet. There are but twenty-five thousand francs in the house. I'll send that at once. Then—"

"But will he take it?"

"Why not?"

"Well, you see—he might—"

"Oh, never fear. He won't be squeamish."

When Prosper received Rose's letter and became aware of its contents, he quietly placed them both in an envelope, wrote Rose's address upon it, and sent it at once to the post-office.

"The woman who bears my name, Clapier," he said to the old clerk, "has just spit in my face."

Meanwhile the inhabitants of Saint Cyprian were in a great state of mind.

"Have you heard the news?"

"What?"

"Parent is on the verge of bankruptcy."

"The devil! Well, I feared it."

A failure in a small town is like a public misfortune. The inhabitants are like mourners at a funeral. What banker, merchant, or business

man of any sort does not wake quaking from a dream which pictures him as failed, ruined, with a furious crowd of creditors clamoring at his doors? How he shudders at the dejected faces, the mute agony, the sobs and the despairing cries that proclaim him—him, the bankrupt—the curse, the ruin of his native town.

Saint Cyprian will long remember the profound sensation produced by the failure of Prosper Parent. It was a thunderbolt, with this difference: it was not the altitudes alone that felt the stroke. His clients had had an unbounded confidence in him. For this reason Prosper had hoped that, by dint of hard work and economy, he might yet repair his fortunes. He had taken the deposits of the poorest people as well as those of the rich. He paid the interest regularly and promptly. So the peasants, the workingmen, the domestic servants, all the poorest people of the town had been glad to have him—had even begged him to—take charge of their scanty savings.

At last the notary perceived that he could put off the evil day no longer—the deluge had come. After having paid Rose's debts and the bills accepted by her, he found his credit exhausted and put up his shutters. He faced ruin quite as coolly as he would have faced the death which he longed for. It was Saturday and a market-day when he suspended payment.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. From the street ascended the hoarse cries of the hawkers, the rumbling of the heavy trucks and wagons, and the other thousand and one sounds of which a city's noise is composed. The cattle-market had about finished its business. Here and there might be seen a peasant driving before him a scared sheep or a calf, the poor animal making desperate endeavors to escape into some alley-way or stable. Country housewives were making their way homewards in little knots, complacently counting the small gains arising from their traffic in chickens and eggs.

All of a sudden a commotion was noticeable in one corner of the market-place. A man could be seen jesticulating wildly. It was a shoemaker named Buisson.

"What's the matter?" asked a number of voices.

"The scoundrel! the thief!" yelled the shoemaker. "It was only yesterday he took my money. Hell and damnation! we are all ruined!"

"What is it?" cried the crowd, becoming excited.

"Parent has closed."

The shoemaker had just learned the terrible news from some farmers who had gone to the notary's house to draw out some money. Immediately a great uproar ensued. The hoarse oaths of desperate men mingled with the shrill cries of

ruined women, to all of whom this failure was a catastrophe. Clubs were brandished in the air, and here and there a dreadful threat was uttered. Suddenly a hush fell upon the crowd. It was occasioned by the arrival of a party of men who had come direct from the notary's house. They reported that the shutters were up and the doors were locked. All hope that the news of the failure might not be true was thus destroyed. The effect upon the crowd was terrible; it was as if the report, like a lighted train of gunpowder, had led to an awful explosion. On every side could be seen men and women, their pale features working with the bitterness of the thoughts that oppressed them, and their eyes blazing with the rage of those who have been robbed of their painfully earned all. Yells and curses arose on every hand. Old women, sobbing, threw themselves into each other's arms, and young ones sat down upon the curbstones, rocking their babies in their laps and crying pitifully. Presently the charge of embezzlement began to be whispered. It ran rapidly through the crowd, and a murmur, growing gradually into a roar, was heard :

“Death to the embezzler! Death!”

“Let's sack the house,” cried the shoemaker Buisson, who had first brought the news.

This was greeted by a yell of acclamation. Some men, armed with axes, mattocks, and other

weapons snatched up on the impulse of the moment, dashed out of the corner of the market-place nearest the notary's house. The crowd followed in mass. And so these dull, quiet, peaceful country-folk, turned by their wrongs into an insane mob, went raving and bellowing up the street like a herd of maddened bulls.

Arrived in front of the house, they at once attacked the door of the office. This, not being constructed to resist a siege, was straightway knocked into kindling-wood. The leaders of the mob dashed into the room. Prosper stood their quietly and waited. He asked nothing better of Fate than that he should be at once dispatched by the mob. Some one struck him a violent blow in the face.

"Kill me," he said. "Only kill me quickly, I beg you."

"Let me smash him, damn him!" cried a hoarse voice from the crowd. A burly ruffian stepped forward, carrying an axe. It was the giant miller of Lameth, the most famous wrestler of the country-side.

But at this moment the notary felt himself thrust aside. A lean figure stood between him and these men who were thirsting for his blood. It was the old clerk Clapier. During all the forty years he had served his present employer and his predecessors, Cornet and Boulestan, no one had

ever seen Clapier lose his temper. He seemed to have lost it now, however. He had a double-barrelled fowling-piece in his hands, and with this he covered the man with the axe.

"Get out of here," he said in a smothered tone, "or I'll put two of you to sleep for good."

The big miller stopped and the front ranks of the mob grew quiet. The two hammers of the fowling piece clicked ominously. But those behind, not knowing what was up, continued to yell,

"Death to the embezzler! death to the bankrupt!"

"I tell you I'm going to smash him," growled the giant, shaking his bull-head as if to reanimate his courage.

"I'll slaughter you as I would a dog if you advance a step," growled Clapier in reply. It was mastiff against bull-dog.

It is probable that the miller would have been forced by the crowd behind him to take the fatal step, in which case he would have doubtless received the promised quietus. But luckily for him, and perhaps for the wife and six children at the Lameth mill, at this moment a squad of mounted police dashed up. The mob dispersed in all directions. A number of officers, headed by the mayor, forced their way into the room.

"Let all good citizens disperse at once," said that functionary in a tone of authority.

"Death to the bankrupt!" cried the shoemaker Buisson. He was at once put under arrest.

"Don't take him," cried Prosper. "Take me. The blame is all mine. Let them kill me."

The officers quickly cleared the room.

"Now, sir," said their chief, "I have here a warrant for your arrest. You will come with me."

"At last!"

That evening old Judge Cornet called upon the notary in his prison-cell.

"Ah, my friend," said the young man, much moved, "you do not desert me."

"No, my dear fellow, why should I? I've come to talk things over with you. What are your liabilities?"

"Two hundred thousand francs."

"So much?"

"Oh, I have been a great villain. I have lied; I have kept false books. I am as good as finished. Let me go, old friend."

"Nonsense! Remember your child."

"I do remember her. It is my greatest punishment."

"You must continue to live for her and work for her."

"Yes. But how?"

"My wife and I will see you through this trouble."

"O my friend, I cannot—I dare not accept your aid."

"Did I refuse your aid when my horse was smashing me against that stone wall? This morning I used all the influence I had with the criminal judge to avoid this arrest and imprisonment. But it was of no avail. The law had to be carried out. You'll have to stand trial. But the rest of the affair will arrange itself. I have in my box at the bank securities for more than the amount of your liabilities. My wife insists that they be used to liquidate your debts. What difference does it make? You are our heir anyhow. You will inherit a little before the time—that's all."

"But I cannot—I cannot."

"But you shall."

At Jarry's Cross the Parent failure was the cause of considerable satisfaction to the envious neighbors of "Big-Purse." But the farmer and his wife were utterly cast down by it. One evening Monsieur Faure went out to call at the White House. He found the two old people sitting dejectedly in their cheerless kitchen. There was no fire on the hearth, although the weather was still cold. Francis excused the lack of it on the ground of poverty.

"We've got to economize now," said he, looking shamefacedly at the merchant.

"I've some good news for you," said the latter.

"What is it?"

"Judge Cornet is going to pay Prosper's debts."

"We can't accept that," interposed Janette. "It will ruin him. Why, it is more than two hundred thousand francs!"

"Oh, that wicked girl!" groaned Francis. "I curse the day she was born."

"Father," said the old woman, softly.

"Yes, I know, I know. I was wrong. It's no use complaining. And so Judge Cornet is going to pay Prosper's debts, eh?"

"Yes; you know he is his adopted son."

"He's a good man, is Judge Cornet," exclaimed the old farmer, getting up and dashing one horny hand across his dim eyes. "Well, we'll help him. We're pretty old to go back to work again. But it can't be helped. I'll sell my two farms—what's left of 'em, and go back to work on the Tremblade Estate. I guess the young master won't lick me so much as his father used to during the ten years I worked for him, forty years ago. Ah! but the little grandchild—what'll become of her?"

"I'll look out for her," said the old merchant.

"Ah, then it seems that no one but it's mother deserts the poor child," said the old man, sorrow-

fully glancing at the little one's cot, which stood in one corner of the kitchen.

"Apropos of Rose," said Faure, "do you know she sent her husband twenty-five thousand francs when she heard of the failure?"

"And he?"

"Returned it."

"Of course he did. Did she think he would accept the price of her dishonor? Ah, but it is we who were to blame—we and that scoundrel Loudois, who is living quietly at Nice now. And she is amusing herself with our member, they say. Just let him come and ask me for my vote. I'll kill him. But, sir, you are a good man—and so is Judge Cornet—both good men—good men."

Two months afterwards the notary was tried on the criminal charge, and acquitted in spite of all the damaging evidence brought against him. The truth was that since his debts had been paid the tide of popular opinion had run strongly and at last unanimously in his favor. His misfortunes were remembered, and he came to be looked upon as a martyr. It is doubtful if in all that countryside a jury could have been picked out that would have convicted him. After his acquittal he received a popular ovation. Among the most enthusiastic of those who cheered him on that occasion were observed the miller of Lameth and the shoemaker Buisson.

Within a month from the date of his acquittal, Prosper, through the influence of his friends Faure and Cornet, was tendered the position of managing clerk for a large wine house in Bordeaux. He departed at once for the field of his new labors, leaving his little daughter, thus so strangely orphaned, to the care of tender friends.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT is doubtful whether Madame de Magnac ever bestowed a thought upon the man whom she and his fate had just brought within the shadow of prison walls. It is certain that she never forgave him for refusing her offer of assistance. She intended, as soon as she was settled in the villa, near the Bois, which her lover had purchased for her, to go to Jarry's Cross and bring away Andrée.

In the mean while she plunged more furiously than ever into dissipation, endeavoring to rival, in the luxury of her establishment and the style of her entertainments, the most exclusive fashionables of the city. Still she was not happy. Her pleasure in it all was factitious. A bitter yearning began to gnaw at her heart.

Her thoughts dwelt insistently upon her first lover, now lost to her forever under the sun-kissed trees of Nice. She had never loved any one but George ; she could never love any but him. The Count, on his part, remained gentle and kind, but he was no longer the ardent lover who had

seduced her from Loudois' arms. She knew that his errant fancy had already been attracted by a new dancer at the opera.

In the midst of all the gayety that made up her daily life, Rose constantly found herself sinking into fits of pensiveness, into regretful memories, into melancholy dreams. George's face rose before the eye of her mind, so sad, so dear, so distant, and seemed to beckon her as a mirage beckons the thirsty traveller in desert wastes.

Meanwhile in a pretty cottage not far from the city of Nice a wee pink baby came to rejoice and unite the hearts of the Loudois'. That spring no happier home than theirs existed under all the soft blue southern sky. It was a delightful picture of *amour à trois*. When the three had wearied of making love to each other in the vine-embowered cottage which they called "The Laurels," the two elders would take pleasant little trips to Monte Carlo or Monaco, where they would renew the memories of their bridal tour.

One evening the two were seated on the piazza of their house, which was built on high ground overlooking the sea. The Mediterranean stretched out to the horizon before them, white and dim in the pale light of the new moon. They sat quietly side by side and hand in hand, wrapped in silence

and surrounded by that atmosphere of virtuous love which the young wife's devotion and single-mindedness had made possible to this once desolate hearth. Marie was dreaming of the old summer days when George, a boy still, used to delight to carry her off with him into the depths of the wild wood.

She remembered one evening in particular when night had surprised them by the side of a great stone cross overgrown with ivy. They were alone together amid the darkness that was gradually blotting out the footpath they were pursuing. The stillness, the gloom, the woodland scents, the presence of the dainty child by his side, had combined to awaken in George for the first time the lover's instinct. As for Marie, a little maid of fifteen years, as innocent of evil as a fawn, she, for her part, loved her young cousin a good deal better than she did her big china doll, which had eyes that could open and shut at pleasure, which could say "mamma" and "papa" with the greatest of ease, and which she was just beginning to suspect was beneath her dignity.

"Do you remember," whispered the young wife, after calling her husband's attention to the time, "how you looked at me when you kissed me? How your heart beat—oh, like a hammer! And how your eyes shone! You squeezed me so

hard that I began to tremble. And when you asked me if I was afraid, I said—”

“ ‘You said’? By Jove! you kissed me back and ran away laughing. It was only after that that you began to be afraid.”

“ Oh yes, I was very much afraid.”

“ Do I remember? Why, you had on a blue dress, and a big white hat which we had wreathed with flowers. You wore russet boots like a little huntress, and, my! how pretty you were! Now you are beautiful.”

“ Do you think so?” she asked, trembling with pleasure. “ I don’t want to be vain, but you don’t know how it delights me when you tell me I am beautiful. Your thoughts never wander?”

“ You have cured me of all that, my love,” said the young husband, gravely. “ Men get insane sometimes. They run away from their happiness.”

“ Isn’t it sweet,” said Marie, presently, laying her head on her husband’s shoulder, “ to feel ourselves so near and so alive to each other while Nature is sleeping all around us? See, how quiet everything is; hardly a sound is to be heard; even the lights in the city away off yonder are going out, one by one, and we are left alone in this sweet balmy air of spring, with God’s dear stars shining above there. O my darling, my darling, my

love seems sometimes more than I can bear—it is so sweet.”

“You are crying?”

“Yes, tears of joy, my husband, tears of joy. Oh, speak to me; your voice fills my heart to overflowing with gratitude and blessedness at my happy lot.”

“My beloved wife, you are an angel of innocence and purity. Thank God for giving you to me.”

“Thank God! Thank God!”

It was the morning after this night of conjugal felicity when George received a letter from Rose. She told him that she had ceased to live since he had gone away from her. At first, to ease her aching heart, she had plunged into all the gayeties of Parisian life. But she was weary of everything. She would become again the submissive mistress of the sweet old days. Would he not come to Paris? She would not detain him long; she wanted just to look into his face once more, and to give him one more proof of that passion which she ought perhaps to despise herself for, but which she was powerless to resist.

George read the letter over carefully a second time. Every word lighted a new flame in his heart. Rose's sweet caressing voice seemed to murmur words of love into his enamoured ear.

Already the evening before with Marie in the moonlight was forgotten. He could hear only the summons of his mistress, full of voluptuous import. Again the Saint Cyprian love-idyl rose before his imagination. Feverish with the long-forgotten desires that had again taken possession of him, he walked hastily up and down the gravelled walk of the terrace, seeing nothing but the lascivious image of his mistress, hearing nothing but her siren-voice luring him on to an embrace that would destroy him for time and for eternity.

A soft voice called to him from the piazza:

"George."

"O Marie, forgive me. My thoughts were wool-gathering. I have just received news that calls me to Paris at once. My old club-friend Jules Marklay needs my assistance. I must—"

"Oh, it is not a duel?"

"Oh no, dear. Nothing so terrible as that. It is only a matter of money. Jules has been plunging and is in a bad fix. I must take the four-o'clock train. I can't leave my old school-friend in the lurch."

"You are not deceiving me, George?"

"Marie, how can you—after last night, too?"

"Oh, forgive me!"

"I will be back in three days, more your lover than ever, dear."

“Truly?”

“Truly.”

“Well, then, kiss me.”

She raised her face to his, and her graceful body yielded itself charmingly to his embrace.

“Once more,” he said, “there on that gold love-lock that sprouts so prettily on your temple. Where’s nurse? I want to kiss the boy good-by.”

At Paris Loudois repaired to the same private hotel to which he had brought Rose a year before. He sent a note to Madame de Magnac, and that afternoon she came to him. She was dressed plainly in black silk. A small jet bonnet surmounted her raven hair, which she wore this time parted in the middle and smoothed on either side after the bourgeoisie fashion. Her languid drawl had disappeared and she had laid aside her supercilious manner. She was again the submissive mistress of old with the laughing eyes and the fresh red lips, where, to use the rather florid expression of one of her poet-admirers, “her teeth gleamed like pearls of light in the cool depths of a rose’s calyx.” She spoke again with the low sweet voice with which she had used to babble to the turtle-doves in their cage by the green-latticed arbor at Saint Cyprian.

“Speak to me again, Rose,” said the transported lover, “as you used to do in those old days—you remember—in my chamber. O my

beloved mistress, I will never leave you again—never !”

“But you must.”

“You do not love him still—De Villemont ?”

“No ; but I do not intend to be your ruin. I have done mischief enough. I have already ruined one man—my husband. Oh, I am an accursed thing.”

“O Rose !”

“It is true. Life is to me a continual punishment. I tried to forget you by hurling myself into the wildest dissipation. Poor fool ! I have seen the great, the powerful at my feet, and have only been nauseated by the love they proffered me. Berk disgusts me when he touches me with hands that are soiled by contact with—well, I will not say. There was a time when I could smile at the intrigues, the meannesses, the hypocrisy, the mendacity of the political life amid which I exist. Now it stifles me. Oh, I so yearned to see you once more.”

“Dear Rose !”

“But if I had not known myself strong enough to resist the temptation to keep you, I would not have sent for you. Is it my fault that I sin ? I am a madwoman, I tell you. I have been mad all my life. Sometimes a cruel remorse gnaws at my heart. I see our old peaceful home, where Prosper thought me all his own ; I see my baby

rocking in her cradle ; I talk of the future with my poor old father. Then a wild desire to fight my way back to that innocent life possesses me. But I cannot. It has been so all my life. My thoughts will be peopled with the sweetest visions of innocence and purity, and then all of a sudden they disappear and everything is black again. Oh, I am afraid, afraid. My poor head ! I tell you, George, I am sinking into hell. Always sin, sin ; always the ruin of those I love. Somehow their innocent pleasures hurt me. It is because I am mad, mad, mad !”

Rose came several times more to the hotel and then she insisted on her lover's going home.

“ You may come again, some time. But I will not have that poor little wife of yours dying of grief on my account.”

But George never came back. Rose's letters to him remained unanswered. The story of her association with the German prince had reached him, and had made him feel disgusted with himself and his insane passion for this woman whom he now looked upon as an adventuress of the most abandoned character. On her side Rose plunged once more into the whirl of dissipation. This was continued with ever-increasing intensity until the day which woke all France from its

fever-dream of luxury and sloth—the day when war was declared against Prussia.

Then, in the midst of the preparations for the conflict that were going on on every side, Rose conceived the idea of abandoning the capital and retiring to Jarry's Cross to live with her parents and Andrée until the war should be concluded.

"Well," said De Villemont when she mentioned the subject to him, "you can do as you please. The war will be a matter of but a few weeks. If you cared to, you might just as well stay in Paris."

"No, I'd rather go. I want to see my little girl."

"Well, we'll see each other again after we've polished off these Germans. I shall be a great man when you get back. We will celebrate the victory royally in our home here."

That night Rose departed. They never saw each other again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Rose drove up to the old farm-house at Jarry's Cross, she saw her mother's gray head at the kitchen window. Janette was shelling peas in a wooden bowl which she held in her lap. At the same time she crooned an old nursery song that had been familiar to Rose in her infancy. Andrée was seated on the kitchen-steps busily engaged in playing at dinner with the aid of some small tin plates and a handful of gravel from the garden-path.

As Rose entered the kitchen and pronounced her mother's name, the old woman looked up at her from over her silver-bowed spectacles. Then crying, "Rose, my daughter, I knew you would come back," she let fall the wooden bowl, and getting up, fell upon her daughter's neck, weeping. The embrace was long and without words. Presently the younger woman turned to her child. The little one stared at this elegant lady who was about to take her in her arms, and suddenly burst into tears.

“Andrée, my child, my daughter, do you not know me?”

“Mamma.”

“Rose,” said Janette, “here is your father.”

“Rose!” exclaimed the old farmer, who at that moment appeared at the kitchen-door. “Rose! Oh no—no—no!”

He staggered back as she approached him, throwing up his hand as if to keep back some baleful presence.

“I swore I’d kill you,” he muttered hoarsely.

Then as he saw Rose turn pale at his brutal words, he suddenly began to cry himself. Then he stretched out his hands to her, and father and daughter, sobbing, were locked in each other’s arms. But the good old fellow was afraid of her still. The rustling of her silks, the sight and touch of her rich jewelry and laces, the sweet odors that were exhaled from all her clothes, called to mind the terrible calamity this creature had precipitated upon them all. But he could not find a harsh word to say to her notwithstanding his bitter memories. So presently he began to talk about Prosper. It seemed that the late notary, upon the first rumors of war, had enlisted and was now a subaltern officer of the ninety-seventh regiment of the line on its way to the frontier. Rose listened in silence to these news. Presently her mother

removed her bonnet and began to smooth her hair.

"Wouldn't you like to go to your room? The old chamber is ready and waiting for you."

Yes, there were the same old pictures of the saints hung upon the wall; the prizes she had won at the Castel seminary were laid out there on the mantel alongside of the work-box she had used when she was a schoolgirl. There were the old mahogany bed, the old plush-covered chairs, the old blue-and-white striped curtains, the old ivory crucifix, the old wall-paper with its roses and bullfinches alternating.

Andrée was still timid and clung to her grandmother's skirts. But during the evening Rose devoted herself to her. She undressed her for bed when bedtime came, covering her tender body with her mother's kisses. And Andrée became once more familiar and at home with this pretty mamma who smelt so sweet and who wore such lovely rings and jewelry. She told her mother that her father had cried a good deal when he went away. Next day she had searched for him everywhere, but she could not find him. In her opinion her papa was dead. But he would come to life again just as mamma had. People did not die forever. But Geordie—what had become of Geordie? He had never come back to her any more. Never mind; she didn't care. She was

getting too big anyway to ride astraddle of old Medor.

The people in the southern parts of France were not much disturbed by the first reverses to the French arms. But toward the latter part of August they had become thoroughly alarmed. On Saint Cyprian especially the news of the disaster of Gravelotte fell like a thunder-clap. The ninety-seventh regiment of the line had been almost annihilated. The colonel and all the principal officers were dead. Prosper Parent had been literally torn to pieces by a discharge of grape-shot. Old Clapier brought the news to Jarry's Cross.

Meanwhile there had been a great deal of trouble at the old farm-house. The croup was ravaging the countryside, and many children had died of it. Little Andrée was taken down with a severe attack. Rose passed ten successive nights in agony at the bedside of her child. She who had been the pet and plaything of the gayest circle of Paris during that last bad year of the Empire, she who had coldly and cruelly destroyed the happiness of two miserable beings, became of a sudden the tender solicitous mother of yore. Andrée slept in her own chamber. Rose, when she slept at all, occupied a mattress on the floor by the side of her child's bed. There night after night she listened in agony to the labored breathing

of the little chest. It seemed to her as if she were expiating the sins of her lifetime right there, in that chamber.

When the news of Parent's death came, Andrée was convalescent, but Rose was prostrated by a severe attack of meningitis. She grew rapidly worse, and it soon became evident that she would never leave her bed alive. Then she expressed a strong desire to see Marie once more before she died, and to obtain the forgiveness of this woman whom she had so wronged. At first they hesitated; but Rose became so insistent that her mother finally requested Clapier to write to Madame Loudois, though she did not believe her request would be granted.

Gradually the sick woman's ideas became obscured. She began to believe that it was her daughter who was dead instead of her husband. Her poor head would toss from side to side, her white bosom would heave beneath the lace of her night-dress, and her eyes would roll vacantly in her head. Once she was taken with such a terrible cryings-pell that the women who watched her, thinking she was possessed of a devil, sent for the priest. But at the sight of his black vestments her hysterics increased alarmingly, and the good man was obliged to go away without administering the last sacrament.

When they showed her her daughter, she did

not recognize her. She knew very well. They were trying to deceive her. Andrée was dead. This was somebody else's child. Her daughter was a good deal prettier than that, her curls were much more silky. No, no, it was not her child.

One evening about dusk she was seized with a fit of nervous trembling. She asked for some holy water, and dipping her fingers in it tried to make the sign of the cross upon her face; but she could not, her hands trembled so. Then she sat up in bed and began to stare in front of her. She seemed to be in some dreadful mental agony. They thought she was on the point of death. Disconnected words and sentences fell from her palid lips.

"Andrée—Andrée—my poor little child. She is down there nailed in her coffin for all eternity. It is I—I who killed her. Oh, how I suffer when I think of it! God may damn me if He chooses. Hell—I am not afraid of hell—it cannot be so bad as this. My daughter—my little daughter. There—there—I can see her—up there—her soft gold curls floating over her shoulders—and she has great white wings. Hark! what noise is that? Oh, the hearse!" Then she began screaming, "I will not die, I tell you; I will not die."

Once they brought Andrée to her, and the little thing, crossing her small hands on her breast, said, with trembling lips,

"See, mamma, I am your little daughter. Won't you speak to me?"

But the mother, laughing hysterically, cried,
"You little liar, go away; go away, I say."

Sometimes her nervous attacks were so severe that Janette to calm her forced her to inhale ether. It was according to the orders of the physician. The sick woman had conceived a horror for the ether-bottle, and when her mother came to her bedside threatening to administer it, she would become at once quiet and supplicating, murmuring brokenly,

"Oh, no—no—not the phial—not the phial."

"Then be careful," Janette would say, wiping away her own tears.

For fear of the cold they had moved her into a big bed in the kitchen. Here for three days she rested more quietly. It was on the last of these days that young Madame Loudois arrived in answer to old Clapier's message. George had gone to the war; Marie herself, but a few months a mother, had conceived it to be her Christian duty to accede to the dying woman's petition.

"She did not wish to die until she had been forgiven by you," murmured Janette to the young woman as she led her into the sick-room. Then leaning over her daughter, she whispered,
"It is Madame Loudois who has come to see you."

Rose looked up quickly ; presently her features began to work convulsively. She seemed to want to weep, but the tears would not come.

"Thanks," she said, "thanks."

Marie kissed her forehead gently and took her hands in her own. For a moment it seemed as if the touch of the virtuous wife had purified this blighted being. Her mouth took on a less bitter expression, and her eyes stared less painfully.

"I have done you much harm. Forgive me. I wanted to be a decent woman myself. But I could not—I could not."

Then she shook her head slowly from side to side.

"If they knew—if they only knew."

Marie seated herself in an arm-chair by the bedside, and taking Andrée in her arms began to fondle her. It was high noon. The sick woman made a sign that the sunlight hurt her eyes. The curtains were drawn, and the room was shrouded in semi-darkness. All of a sudden Rose sat up in bed and began to stare at Marie with a wild, insane expression upon her countenance.

"Tell me," she hissed presently, "why did you come here? What do you want? Ah, I know. You've come for George. He belongs to me. You shall not have him. I will keep him. Go—go away. Go away, you hateful, jealous thing!"

Marie jumped up frightened, and then stretched

her arms out toward the dying woman as toward some dreadful apparition. Janette came with the ether-bottle. But Rose pushed her back, crying,

"Yes, he is mine, my darling George. I am his Rose—his rosebud, he used to call me. And I loved him so. You never loved him as I did, better than my life. Oh, how beautiful he is! I press him in my arms. Oh, how beautiful!"

The voice was becoming hoarse as the death-rattle approached.

"War! Gravelotte! Take care, Prosper. There is the German prince with his bad, wicked smile. Oh, he is dead—Prosper is dead for his country. Oh, how I suffer. My brain is on fire. Mercy! mercy! Oh, look at them—the detestable black butterflies! George, come to me. Oh, I'm going mad with the pain. For God's sake—mercy! Oh—!"

She fell back upon the pillow stone-dead.

The room was filled with people. The old clerk, Clapier, had been standing at the foot of the bed. He looked sadly down upon the marble face that was fast becoming rigid in the sleep that knows no waking. The great eyes were closed forever, but on the lips there lingered the ghost of a voluptuous, scoffing laugh.

The old clerk felt his heart touched with pity

in the presence of this dead woman, though she had done nothing but harm all her life long.

“Poor creature!” he thought, “poor head, all topsy-turvy!”

That is the word.

Topsy-turvy!

THE END.





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